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Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®

Accessory

CARNIVAL

FOR USE IN Ravenloft OR ANY OTHER AD&D CAMPAIGN SETTING

LOCKWOOD 96

JOHN W. MANGRUM AND STEVE MILLER

CARNIVAL

John W. Mangrum & Steve Miller

Freak show or sanctuary?

It's all a matter of perspective
when you're at Carnival.

A carnival offers a glimpse of abnormal and unnatural things most genteel folk never talk about, much less see. This carnival is not a simple sideshow, though, and its performers are far more than freaks on display. Carnival is a wandering haven for those who have no place else to go—including adventurers who made enemies of the wrong people. Under the protection of its mysterious mistress Isolde, it offers refuge to those rejected by the world. Outcasts and lost souls of all kinds can find solace here, and sometimes even a second chance at life . . . but nothing at Carnival comes without a price.

This accessory draws back the curtain on dark secrets that will enrich any AD&D campaign with a touch of the bizarre and horrific. Included are over a dozen richly detailed nonplayer characters, details on "the price" that Carnival exacts from those who travel with it, and story seeds to lure unsuspecting heroes into a web of mystery and trickery.

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Carnival

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Two roads converged in a wood, and I—
I took the road less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost
"The Road Not Taken"

PRELUDE TO COMING EVENTS

Outside, the sun shone brightly. The scullery maid called Blasse remained indoors where no one could see her, where no one would ridicule her ghostly skin and pinkish eyes. She tried to focus on her work in the cellar, but all day, she had suffered from a curious sense of anticipation, a feeling that something momentous was about to occur.

Then the door creaked open, and Blasse turned to see who had invaded her peace. A dark stranger stepped into the room. At once, Blasse felt enrapt; the man was simply the most beautiful creature she had ever seen, and meeting his depthless gaze stole her breath away.

The gentleman offered her a hand and helped Blasse to her feet. "Why is it," he said softly, "that when others look at you they do not see what I see? Why do they shun you, when I wish only to become lost in your beauty?"

He ran a hand through Blasse's snowy hair; his touch was electric, and his voice left her spellbound.

"Your beauty blinds me," he continued, leaning in closer. "And I can make it so that all the others see your beauty just as brightly. I can make you the object of all men's desire, and the envy of all women.

"Do you want to be what I can make you? Do you want to be what we can become together? All you must do is say . . . *yes.*"

A wave of desire welled up from Blasse's heart, pushing the word to her lips, but before she could speak, a sudden draft rushed through the door, and a square of parchment drifted into the room. The paper landed before Blasse's feet. As she glanced down upon it, she felt a strange attraction, for the paper's magic affected her even more strongly than the man's.

The parchment was a handbill decorated with strange, swirling designs. Blasse began to see images in the colored patterns: unnatural beasts, distorted figures, exotic and unearthly delights . . . and there was a word, too, but she could not read it. She knelt to pick up the paper.

"What does this mean?" she whispered, unable to look away from the handbill, even though she tried.

The visitor let out a low growl. "It means the Carnival is coming," he replied. He chuckled darkly. "A little piece of hell, on wheels."

But Blasse did not hear him. When at last she looked up from the curious paper, the man was gone. She lifted her hand to her cheek; the skin was still warm from his touch.

THE PRESENTATION

It begins with a tingle of anticipation, a sense of dread or hope, but nothing more. Out of the blue, the residents of a village sense that someone, or something, soon will enter their lives. Then the handbills appear—eerie, teasing flyers, promising that the Carnival is near. By the next morn, the painted wagons will be rolling into town.

To those who flock to its spectacle, the Carnival is a traveling freak show that offers a "safe" glimpse of the abnormal and the unnatural. For once in their lives, and for just a copper or two, common folk can stand in the light of day and examine the bogeymen that haunt their nightmares. But the Carnival is much more than a simple sideshow, and its performers are more than mere freaks on display. Under the protection of its mistress, Isolde, the Carnival offers refuge to those rejected by the world. Often, it comes to the aid of those who simply need to disappear, secreting them away into the Mists.

Freak show or haven, monsters or allies—it's all a matter of perspective. This accessory offers an in-depth look at the Carnival, introduces its people, and exposes a phenomenon called the Twisting, which can change the lives of those who travel with the troupe forever.

The text is presented as a guided tour. Each chapter has its own narrator: a Carny barker, then a fortuneteller, and finally a scheming professor who manages the Carnival's "Hall of Horrors." Their audience is an Outsider—someone who comes to the Carnival seeking refuge. The narrators hold differing views, and each tells his or her own version of the truth as they lift the curtain on Carnival Secrets. While they may lie or mislead, don't despair; as the Dungeon Master (DM), you'll be privy to the underlying facts. In fact, the last page of this book reveals the greatest secret of all: who is the woman who leads the Carnival. The players, however, should be left to figure things out for themselves.

After the heroes in your campaign have had some experience with the Carnival (perhaps after you've run the adventures in the Appendix), you may decide to let your players read some of this book. After all, the audience for the narrated tour is someone just like the heroes. Even if you don't share this text, however, the format is designed with a purpose: It provides a useful tool for your own role-playing, showing how three prominent members of the Carnival would interact with "Georges"—newcomers to the circle of freaks.

The Outsider looked at the handbill again and wondered if he was losing his mind. He had found the strange paper in his vest when he had awakened, still hiding in a tiny cave. And for one brief moment, he had forgotten his plight. Nils and Huron were dead, and he would undoubtedly follow, just as soon as the Beast found him. Unless . . .

He gazed once more at the handbill, amazed by its colored designs. It advertised a carnival. He had better things to do than cavort with freaks and con men, and yet, something prompted him to seek out the place . . .

As he walked onto the makeshift midway, he found it easy to lose himself in the laughter of the crowd, to be soothed by the strains of violin music that permeated the air. Then something tapped his shoulder, and the Outsider wheeled to face a giant man. The giant smiled.

"You look lost, Stranger," he said softly. "But fear not, you are safe with the Carnival. Come, let me direct you toward Tindal . . ."

The Barker's Tour

CHAPTER ONE

In Nature there's no blemish but the mind
None can be call'd deform'd but the unkind:
Virtue is beauty, but the beauteous evil
Are empty trunks o'erflourish'd by the devil.

—William Shakespeare
***Twelfth Night,* Act III, Scene IV**

TINDAL AT YOUR SERVICE

Welcome, one! Welcome, all! Welcome to the short, and welcome to the tall! Welcome angels, welcome fiends, welcome to all from walks between! Welcome to the Carnival!

Step right up and lay your eyes on our menagerie of the macabre, our gathering of the grotesque, our collection of the curious, our festival of freaks! For a mere pair of copper coins, you can behold wonders beyond your wildest dreams and nightmares. Yes, that's right, folks—just two thin coppers buys you a ticket to thrills and chilling revelations! Step right this way and through the first curtain!

But not you, Stranger. You stay here with me. I'm told that our gentle giant, Hermos, sent you my way; seems you'd like to disappear for a little while. Out of curiosity, what's your trouble? Try to plant a stake in the wrong fellow's heart, or are you just running out on some burgomeister's daughter? On second thought, just keep it to yourself. We don't care what you're running from, so long as you don't drag it here to our doorstep.

I'm inside out when I say your visit could be more timely; I'm supposed to be running herd on all those new Georges, not just you. But another barker will have to walk the talk today. You look puzzled, stranger. Quite right—I'll bet you're having a little trouble following my words. Get used to it. "Inside out" just means "honest." I'll give you that one for free. But don't expect too many more favors, because *nothing* comes free at the Carnival.

You see, we Troupers just love talking over the heads of you Georges. I must be feeling generous, because here's another one for free: *Georges.* That means anyone who's not with the Carnival. You'll hear a lot of words like that one. No one's ever going to sit you down and teach you what they mean, but don't worry; you'll pick up the lingo soon enough.

As you wander around, you'll hear some of your fellow Georges use words like "freak" when they're talking about Troupers. I'll warn you right now to leave that kind of talk behind if you want to come with us. "Freak" is a very special word, my friend, and *you* haven't earned the right to use it. Yes, it's true I use it myself. All the Troupers do, but it's different when we say it. When it comes from our lips, we're just saying we aren't like you Georges. I've never heard a George say "freak" who wasn't casting an insult, calling someone a monster. And most Troupers have heard more than a lifetime's worth of that kind of bile, so if you label someone here a monster, George, you'd sure better mean it, because you're going to have to defend yourself. Are we clear?

Tell you what, George. Let's make a game of our little encounter. We'll call it "How Long is Your Life?" Here, pick a card, any card, and put it back in the deck. If I can guess which card you picked, I promise we'll get you out of these parts, safe and sound. If I can't guess your card, we'll leave you here to face whatever fiend or foe has you running. Sound fun? Sound fair? Well, I think so!

Hmm. Your card is . . . the Ace of Bones? Of course! You can breathe again, George; there was no chance of my getting it wrong. Just a little puckery at your expense. Oh, don't worry; all my magic tricks are done with smoke and mirrors.

Welcome to the Carnival, George. You can call me Tindal. I'm the main barker for our acts, at least those who could use a little extra drama. Oh, there's Professor Pacali over there past that big tent. He's the barker for all the *real* freaks, but he and his cronies are bit skurry, if you ask me. Just stick near me, and you'll do all right.

It's my job to take the Georges' coppers and make sure they keep their greasy little hands to themselves. With my silvered tongue, I bring it all to life for them. I herd each group of Georges around the big ring, and generally show off about ten of our acts before I drop them off at the Hall of Horrors for the big squeeze. The Hall of Horrors—now that's Pacali's crew.

Tell you what; since it looks like you might be staying with us awhile, I'll treat you to a grand tour just for one! It's a wonderful world we've made for ourselves in the Carnival. We have delights for all of the senses! Walk with me now, soak it all in; it'll do wonders for your spirits, George.

Even if you ignore our performers—and I don't see how you could do that—we have endless colors to enchant the eyes. Look at our wagons, each one a work of art, even if we do cover them up with our big banners. The wagons all belong to the Skurra, our Vistani. And just behold those bombastic banners! Each canvas filled with amazing images to entice the imagination, each one a masterpiece! I mean, if I saw a portrait like that one of a "Hideous Man-Beast," I'd be dying to see the creature in the flesh, wouldn't you?

Now look to your left, toward the center of the Carnival. Do you see that fairly ordinary looking wagon, just there? It's a bit hidden by our banners and booths. That wagon belongs to Isolde, our dear Mistress of the Carnival. She holds us together, but don't expect to deal with her much–unless you're a problem. Hermos the Giant is her right-hand man. What's that? Don't bother asking about Isolde right now. And if you keep interrupting my spiel, I might just leave you at the Hall of Horrors and let Pacali pickle your brain with those lectures of his!

As I was saying, the Carnival is a feast for all of your senses. . . . Lay your eyes on the wooden masks and canes our artisans sell—a little bit of the Carnival you can take home with you, and a bargain at twice the price (if you're a sucker, that is).

And do you hear those dulcet gypsy tones from our wandering musicians? Let the music fill your ears. Listen closely, and hear how the violins seem to follow you around the Carnival. Even when you can't see them, they stay with you, as if the musicians are playing just for you. Mesmerizing, isn't it? You should ask the Skurra how they do it. They won't answer, of course—good luck getting the Skurra to answer anything—but you might enjoy asking just the same.

And now, my friend, take a deep breath . . . and smell that air. Take in all the aromas, from the sawdust

The Dungeon Master's Tour

As the Dungeon Master, you may decide to let players read certain sections of this accessory, since the main text is a narrated tour for a new "guest" of the Carnival. Whether you choose to share this narrative directly or simply use it as a tool for your own role-playing, be aware that information in shaded sidebars like this one is *for your eyes only*. The sidebars contain game rules and revelations enabling you to make full use of the Carnival in your campaign. (So if you aren't the DM, you don't have a ticket for this private tour. *Scram!*)

Trouper Lingo

Performers traveling with the Carnival are an insular and elitist group who feel no need to include outsiders in their conversations. As a result, Carny speech is often peppered with slang—especially when an outsider stands within earshot. Here's a quick glossary of common terms:

Barker. An announcer for the various acts. Since they need to establish a rapport with the audience, barkers are typically also Wisps (see below). Tindal, the narrator of this chapter, is the Carnival's lead barker.

George. Any mundane outsider; a paying customer seeking entertainment; a sucker. Somewhat derisive, the term is a corruption of *giorgio* (a Vistani word for anyone who is not a gypsy).

Inside Out. Honest. Short for "inside out and still the same." Derived from the belief held by some Troupers that the Twisting (see below) physically manifests all of one's inner flaws. Saying someone is "inside out" means they have nothing to hide.

Mongrel. Anyone who travels with the Carnival but is not a Trouper or a regular member, including the Skurra or any hero or NPC who travels with the Carnival for more than just a brief time. The term is derived from the countless stray animals that always seem to tag along behind the Carnival.

Puck, Puckery. Any trick or exaggeration. Also the practice of "enhancing" an existing oddity to heighten its shock value.

The Puppet Show. The Trouper term for the Carnival l'Morai, once a sad group of cursed performers. (Their complete story is told in the novel *Carnival of Fear.*) Although fugitives from that troupe became the first members of the Carnival described in this book, the two should not be confused. The Puppet Show was led by the Puppetmaster, a villain whose name still invokes fear today. Isolde, now Mistress of the Carnival, did not belong to that original group. For more information, see "Hermos" and "The Vampiress" later in this chapter, and "How the Carnival Began" in Chapter Two. The *Domains of Dread* rulebook and the accessory *Champions of the Mist* also provide further detail.

Reeler. Someone likely to faint at the sight of shocking or grotesque acts; a coward.

Seer. Anyone who looks past the Troupers' appearances to see the people within.

Skurra. The mute, insular Vistani of the Carnival who wear magical face-paint. They own and drive the vardos (wagons). Most are also performers. Troupers know that these Vistani dislike being referred to as "clowns."

Skurra-vera. The magical face-paint of the Skurra.

Skurry. An adjective meaning "slightly off-kilter," in a humorous or peculiar way. Not a word favored by the Skurra.

Strings. Characters who "have strings" are enslaved or not acting under their own volition. To "pull someone's strings" is to force or trick them into doing something against their will. Both idioms are derived from the group's experience with the Puppet Show.

Squeeze, the. A little extra show for a little extra fee. To "give someone the squeeze" is to lead them on.

Trouper. A regular with the Carnival who is neither Skurra nor one of the seven Abominations in the Hall of Horrors. Also, anyone who has traveled with the Carnival long enough to undergo the Twisting.

Twisting, the. An unnatural mutation that seems to affect every living being that travels with the Carnival for more than a brief time. Usually, some physical aberration results (resulting in a "freak" and a new act).

Wisp. A trouper who can still pass undetected in mundane society (perhaps with a little work), even after the Twisting takes effect.

to the sweat to the women's perfume—for that's the scent of motion and life itself! Why, I even like the smell of those spitting, sputtering candles that Wood'n-Head makes for us. Who's Wood'n-Head, you ask? Patience, patience, you'll meet him soon enough.

Of course, not even Wood'n Head's candles compare to the alluring flavors of our exotic foods. Yes, that's right; the food will cost you a few coins more, but it's worth it. Every coin you spend repays you with a new wonderment! Everyone loves a foreign feast, and it's so simple to produce. In fact, just between you and me, George, you'd be surprised how often whatever they sell as cheap gruel in this town might be considered an outlandish delicacy at the next.

What's that? Where's our next stop? My, but you *are* in a hurry to leave this spot, aren't you? As it happens, I haven't the faintest idea where we're going. None of us do. Well, maybe the Skurra, or Isolde, but I doubt it. And Isolde is no more likely to tell you than the Skurra anyway. We Troupers talk about it quite a bit—the mystery of the road ahead—but none of us has ever been able to find any rhyme or reason in where we go or when we go there. It seems fairly random to me, actually. It could well be that not even the Skurra who drive the wagons know where we're headed next.

But I have noticed this: Wherever we stop, something always seems to happen that demands our attention. Maybe we offer a haven to some pathetic George like you, or maybe we drop somebody off to make a fresh start. Sometimes we give a needy Trouper a new home with us, or Isolde topples something that needs toppling. On the other hand, sometimes we just stop to buy fresh vegetables, so I wouldn't read too much into it all.

Hrmm? Ah, yes, the fifth sense. You want to know what we provide for *that*. Just use your imagination, George. Many secrets lie behind those curtains. Discovery has a price, of course, but I'll say no more—it's not exactly my end of the squeeze.

The Phantom Flyers

So, how is it that you came to this Carnival? Let me guess, it was a flyer, wasn't it? I knew it!

Quite the eerie enigma, those sinister slips of paper. I have no idea who it is that foresees our coming and nails up all those little handbills; as far as I can tell, not even Isolde herself knows! But everywhere we go, at every single stop, at least a dozen flyers have been posted to announce our approach. I often ask around, but no one has ever seen the mysterious herald who acts as our publicist. And yet sometimes a poster might appear in a spot that's been left unwatched for no more than a heartbeat!

Stranger still is *where* those flyers appear. Naturally we always find some in the expected spots—on the front door of a tavern, or on a post in the town square, for instance. But they also turn up in the most peculiar places. I know of one flyer that was discovered nailed to the wall outside a second-story bedroom window, and another that mysteriously appeared inside a locked cell in a castle dungeon!

And if you think *that's* odd, you should consider the flyers themselves. Each is a masterpiece of the inker's art. I've never seen two with identical letters or designs, so someone out there must be very hard at work.

The flyers remind me of those clever little illustrations that fool the eye. Surely you've see one at some point in life. There's one I particularly enjoy: Look at it one way, and it resembles a pretty maiden; look at it from a fresh view, and it looks just like a monstrous spider. The Carnival flyers seem to trick the eye in the same fashion, but at a much more powerful level.

Everyone who looks at a particular flyer might see something completely different. Some Georges might make out entire portraits of our performers, while others just see the word "Carnival" in weird script. Sometimes those phantom images fascinate the mind; sometimes they infect the soul with dread. But whatever it is the flyer shows, it always seems to pluck just the right heartstrings and lure the Georges to our camp. So I guess we should be grateful.

However it is the flyers work, I wish I could meet the artist who creates them. I'm drooling to know how these blasted things tease at so much power without betraying the use of any magic. *Hrmm?* Well, of course I'm capable of detecting traces of sorcery! Yes, I know I told you all my tricks are done with mirrors. But you didn't ask how those mirrors are *used*, did you?

Anyway, I don't think Isolde finds the flyers as intriguing as I do. I've seen her snatch them down from wherever she finds them, and they never leave her looking particularly pleased. Why doesn't she like them? Well, that's just one of many things she keeps to herself. Try to ask her if you'd like; she won't give you an answer.

Who's Running the Show?

Yes, George, I heard you; you want to know more about Isolde, our beloved patron. How to describe her? Well, really, the Mistress of the Carnival is like one of those flyers: What you see depends on your point of view.

Must you press the point? Very well, I confess: I don't actually know much about her—at least not about her past or her true identity, assuming she's hiding one. None of us do. Oh, we all have our guesses, but that's all they are—little theories we've pieced together from whatever crumbs she drops. But if I were you, I wouldn't trust anyone's theories, not even mine. How about we just agree that Isolde is one of the most beautiful and generous women to ever walk these lands. And you'd do well to remember two things: She likes her privacy. And when she's crossed, her vengeance knows no bounds.

I mentioned that Isolde's wagon is always parked in the center of the Carnival, but don't think that *she'll* be so easy to pin down. She's rarely at home. In fact, Isolde is quite elusive; she tends to circle all around the camp, keeping a watchful eye on this and that. She moves around so much that sometimes I've had

The Phantom Flyers

No one can say for certain who or what posts the flyers that herald the coming of the Carnival. Nor can any amount of scrying or investigation show the flyers to be anything more than mundane ink and paper. (For a viable theory, see page 64.) Nonetheless, the power of their ornate designs is undeniable.

Different viewers react to the flyers in different ways. Most people simply see surreal or peculiar images that pique their curiosity, and after a few moments the word *Carnival* emerges on the sheet. Lost souls seeking refuge from some threat—whether that threat comes from without or from within—frequently see teasing glimpses of their hopes and dreams within the flyer's swirls of ink. Naturally, those images leave them aching to find the mysterious haven the flyers offer. But for other viewers, the effect is hardly so pleasant. Characters with dark hearts—who harbor vile secrets or who have committed heinous acts, as well as those who are simply shallow and cruel— may sense their own inner demons staring back at them from the bottomless spirals.

Exactly what a character experiences when he looks into a flyer's patterns is not decided along the simple lines of good and evil, however. As the Dungeon Master, you must pay careful attention to the motivation and personality of each hero, and tailor a flyer's effects accordingly.

The first time any viewer whose Intelligence is low or better (5 or higher) looks at a flyer, he or she must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or be *enthralled*. (The dancing images reach deep into the character's mind, with an effect similar to the 2nd-level priest spell *enthrall*.) If the saving throw is failed, the viewer stands motionless, staring into the flyer, totally oblivious to his or her surroundings for 1d4 rounds. Vulnerable viewers must make a separate saving throw each time they look at a flyer. With each successive failure, they become mesmerized once more. However, once they succeed at the saving throw vs. spell, no flyer can *enthrall* them again.

Hermos

Hermos is gentle, kind-hearted man who stands 10 feet tall as has long, awkward limbs. He serves as the Carnival foreman and provides spiritual guidance to the Troupers, most of whom respect and love him. Originally with the Puppet Show (the Carnival l'Morai), he helped overthrow the Puppetmaster and led other fugitives into the Mists. In Darkon, the hapless band met with trouble, and Isolde arrived on the scene to save them. Hermos is the only person around whom the Mistress of the Carnival appears fully at ease. This gentle man-giant is fully described in the RAVENLOFT® accessory *Champions of the Mists*.

Hermos, male human, 0-level: AC 10; MV 12; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1 (fists); Dmg 1d2+2 (Str bonus); SA +1 bonus on attack rolls; SZ M; ML champion (15); Str 18, Dex 9, Con 15, Int 10, Wis 13, Cha 12; AL NG.

difficulty actually finding her at all. Mind you, though, she's always there for us when we need her!

Fortunately, I can tell you all about Hermos. He's the one you'll really be dealing with; when it comes to running the show, Isolde is more like a figurehead. True, if not for her, none of us would be as well off as we are now, but she never gets involved in the mundane details of the Carnival. You won't see her counting coins or mending a torn banner, though I do suspect she keeps her plate full in her own way. You might say that she has "higher" responsibilities than we humble Troupers. *Is she a priestess,* you ask? Hah! Definitely not!

Yes, Hermos does the hands-on work of running the Carnival. He takes care of little squabbles that pop up between performers, he oversees the payroll, and he generally stays on his toes to make sure our little traveling show operates smoothly. And you really should see Hermos on his toes. All that work, and he gives children free rides on his shoulders. I'd say he has a big heart, but when you're 10 feet tall, I imagine that should be fairly obvious. Yes, I do find myself amusing, thank you.

But you've already met Hermos, haven't you? Right then; I won't waste my time parroting what he's already told you himself. There's a lot you need to know if you're going to be traveling with us.

LIFE AWAY FROM PRYING EYES

Before I introduce you to any of the Troupers, I think I should explain how things work around here. Up to now, you've probably never rubbed two thoughts together over our performers, beyond their bizarre bodies anyway. As far as you Georges know, we pull up outside your town, haul a bunch of freaks and monsters out of their cages, and at the end of the day we stuff them back in their boxes and wait for the next paying crowd.

Well, actually, we do just that with a very few, but it's not the rule. That only goes for the Abominations we keep in the Hall of Horrors. They're true monsters, but you don't have to worry about them. The rest of us, we're all people just like you, where it counts, at least. If dancing for your coppers is what it takes to survive, so be it. Most of us actually do love performing; it's in our blood. But don't mistake that for any love for you Georges. Whenever you Georges see something that doesn't look like you, you all start thinking about "monsters" and "corruption." Don't deny it, George, I was raised hearing those same old wives' tales, just like you, and for a long, shameful time I believed them too.

How does the saying go? "Sins of the heart are repaid in the flesh," I believe. It comes from a fable about spiteful spirits that warp the bodies of evildoers. In the Carnival, we know how hollow such tales can be. We know how to look past appearances, and we've learned that the only true freaks are those who are twisted on the inside. It's what lies in your soul that counts, and we're even fairly forgiving on that account, fortunately for me.

If you want to stay with us, then you have to open your eyes. That's the trick, George; that's why we're helping you. We haven't given you a place to hide so you can avoid the messes you've made of your life. We're here so you can make something better of yourself. You're getting a second chance, George. It's the dearest gift that Isolde has given us, and it's why we follow her. If you can accept that our Troupers are people just like you, you might even enjoy your time with us.

Let me ask you a question: When was the last time you slept under the open skies without fear? When's the last time you looked into the shadows and knew no horrors lurked there? Can't remember, can you? That's the way it was for me before I came here. It's that way for virtually every George.

When the sun sets, the Georges shutter their windows, bar their doors, and hide under their beds. Here at the Carnival, we light our campfires, set up our long tables, and enjoy a feast of food and drink from throughout the world. The Skurra play their music, and we laugh, and we live in contentment. In their heart of hearts, Georges fear everything. The only thing we Troupers have to fear is the Georges, and with Isolde watching over us, usually we don't even fear them.

A life without fear. Of course, it does have its costs; nothing comes for free at the Carnival. But that's something else you don't have to worry about right now. The sun is starting to sink, so I should show you where you'll be sleeping tonight.

Monsters? Where? Oh, those little beasts. They're not monsters. They're called creeplings or fidgets, depending on who's doing the calling. About twenty of them lurk around here, maybe more. I suppose they're our strays and vermin. Don't worry, they're harmless. Well, mostly.

Trust and Acceptance

Members of the Carnival know better than to judge others by mere appearances; most Troupers have learned this through lives spent being tormented as fiends. If any character normally suffers a Charisma penalty due to physical deformities (failed powers checks and goblyn feasting being just two common reasons that a hero might fit this description), the penalty does not apply among Troupers or even the Skurra. Carnival regulars take little notice of such oddities and quirks, and they react according to a character's actual (or normal) Charisma score.

The Carnival accepts anyone who comes to them seeking asylum, no questions asked. However, this does not mean that every new Mongrel is welcomed with open arms. In fact, most Mongrels are kept at arm's length. Trust is a very valuable commodity in the Carnival. Its members reserve it solely for Isolde, whom they trust most of all, and for fellow Troupers. (Professor Pacali is an exception; see Chapter 3 for details on his secret schemes against Isolde.) From the viewpoint of the regular performers, not even the Skurra can be totally trusted.

Nights Without Fear

Compared to anywhere else in the Domains, the Carnival seems to exist under an unseen curtain of protection; no matter where the Carnival camps, it is very rare that any sort of menace will emerge from the night to threaten its inhabitants. Random encounters are unheard of within the Carnival's ring of wagons, even when the surrounding countryside might be crawling with dangers. On occasion, various creatures have dared to attack the Carnival's campsite, but they have always been quickly and efficiently dispatched by Isolde.

The Troupers have noticed this subtle effect, and alternately attribute it to Skurra magic or to Isolde's supervision. Neither the Vistani nor the Mistress of the Carnival has ever taken credit for it.

Note: For details on the "creeplings and fidgets" Tindal mentions, see "The Organ Grinder" in Chapter Two.

The Skurra and Their Wagons

Turn your attention to our wagons—the meat and bones of the Carnival! We might be able to get along without them, but I wouldn't care to try! Hrmm? Yes, I'm not surprised that you find our wagons familiar to the eye; most of them started their lives as Vistani vardos. I think you'll find we've made quite a few improvements, however, to suit our needs. Each of our wagons serves as a rolling theater, a home for those who have no home, and a pack mule, all in one.

I call them "our" wagons, but technically that's not true. The Carnival has about forty now, and each one belongs to a member of the Skurra, who drives it when we pull up stakes. I've never seen anyone even try to take the reins; maybe the Skurra are the only ones who can keep with Isolde. Anyway, we Troupers prefer to ride inside. Each vardo can carry up to four of us, but we're rarely that cramped.

The Vistani procure a new wagon whenever we need one, but that doesn't happen more than once or twice a year as a rule. A few Skurra disappear for a week, and then they come back with an ordinary run-down vardo. It's nobody's business how they do it. Once they're back with the Carnival, the Skurra patch up the wagon and start making improvements, like makeshift stages and such.

Where do the Skurra get the wagons? It's not my business to ask. Frankly, the Skurra aren't my area of expertise; they do what they do, and they go where they will, and I haven't the thinnest notion what goes on inside their heads. Well, that's not entirely true, but I doubt you're in the mood for a ghost story.

Oho, you *are* in the mood for a ghost story! Well then, let me take a moment to tell one. . . .

The Skurra are not like any other Vistani, mark my words, George. Most of them arrive here alone, meaning one by one. That by itself is strange, because the Vistani are typically a social bunch. Added to that, many of these gypsies came here injured or dying, although they seemed to recover awfully fast once they were here and the other Skurra painted their faces with that hideous paste.

And they've all got uncanny powers—powers you might earn from a trip to the graveyard, if you catch my drift. For instance, I've noticed the Skurra seem to have a knack for knowing when Isolde wants to pull up stakes even before she's announced it. They also seem to have a way of knowing things about people that no other mortal could even guess, not even other Vistani. Watch out, because the Skurra exploit their knowledge of your dark little secrets whenever they feel it's necessary. What's more, all of them seem to share some sort of mental bond. If one of them spots a George who's trying to run from camp with a pilfered trinket from one of the booths, they all zero in on him as if they share the same thoughts. And all this without uttering a word!

They never do utter a word, in fact. They're mute. I've never heard one make the slightest sound other than the wonderful music that pours from their instruments.

So where are the ghosts? *They* are the ghosts! Oh, sure, some might disagree with me, but I know it's true. After all, at least one of their women came here after "escaping" the death squads in Invidia. Not likely is it? She made it out, all right, but I doubt she escaped those squads *alive*.

Try looking at the faces under those painted masks. It's not easy. That's because there are no faces, George! The Skurra, our faithful drivers, those harmless entertainers strolling through the Carnival while juggling knives and balls, are the restless spirits of Vistani who were murdered while apart from their tribes, and now they're unable to find their way home. Like so many other lost souls, they have come to Isolde and the Carnival to find peace. And the wagons they bring and drive for us? Obviously, they are the very vardos these Vistani once lived in.

Oh, so you think you know a ghost when you see one, do you? We'll see about that when I introduce you to the performers! At any rate, George, it's just a notion I cooked up. If you stick around long enough to come up with another one, I'd love to hear it.

Anyway, I've become rather sidetracked. We were talking about the *wagons*. . . .

Our main concerns are utility and speed. Allow me to explain. Some of our Troupers like to wander around the Carnival, mingling with the crowds—Hermos is a good example with those kiddie-rides. Most of us, though, prefer to perform from platforms, so we set up these little wooden stages using the side of the wagon as a backdrop. The stage is just your basic skeletal structure, not much more than knee-high, but when we drape it with our painted canvases, and hang banners from the sides, the wagon is transformed before your very eyes! In one fell swoop, we keep the Georges from creeping in too close, and we raise the Troupers above the throng, where they belong. Quite often we'll also install a side door in the wagon like the one you see there, so the Troupers can get "back stage" if they need to without having to get near the groping Georges.

As I said, speed is a concern as well. Isolde decides when it's time to hit the road, and she doesn't give much notice. Sometimes we need to pull stakes and go very quickly. In fact, with all the ropes and pivots we have hanging off these wagons, at a moment's notice we can just fold up the stage against the side of the wagon, wrap up the banners and canopies, throw our gear on top, tie it all off, and be gone in a flash! True, when the wagons are all packed up they do look a fright, but they do the job.

And that's not all! Some of our Troupers have special needs, so we build whatever they require into their wagon, and that's not even including the lock-boxes. Lock-boxes? Those are the caged wagons we use to contain particularly vicious exhibits. I have yet to see the creature that can bend the bars on a lock-box!

But let me show you something special, George. This is my favorite feature, one we build into all our wagons. . . . *Ta-da!* Yes, George, you're very quick; that *is* a secret compartment in the floor. And since you may

Skurra Wagons & Lock-boxes

The Carnival's vardos can be packed and unpacked with amazing speed. It takes only a single turn from the moment Isolde issues the order to pull stakes to have the entire Carnival ready to leave. Secret compartments vary in size and location from wagon to wagon, but in general each wagon has enough room to hide a single human-sized passenger (or 200 pounds of goods).

The wagons themselves have enough room to fit four inhabitants in fairly cramped conditions, but as yet no vardo is home to more than two or three Troupers. For their part, the Carnival's resident Vistani prefer to sleep under the open skies.

The Carnival currently has about 40 wagons. Six of them are called *lock-boxes*. These are essentially steel cages on wheels, divided into two compartments by a thick wooden partition. The cages house seven Carnival "performers" that are too dangerous to be allowed to roam free: the Hideous Man-Beast and the six Abominations. (Some compartments remain empty.) Built to resist the flailing of supernatural strength, the thick steel bars inflict a –10% penalty on any attempts to Bend Bars. On the other hand, the locks on the cages are fairly simple affairs, presenting a +10% bonus to a thief's Pick Locks attempt.

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experience it firsthand later, let me assure you that this compartment is big enough to hold you. It's no roomier than a coffin, but if it came to a choice, I think you'd rather we put you *here* than in a bone-box. No, we don't build the secret compartments just for you Georges; they're useful for all sorts of smuggling. . . .

Carny Law

Yes, I did say "smuggling." Don't look so shocked, my little contraband. Might I remind you that one of the many goods we illegally smuggle around the Domains is you? Or I suppose you'd like me to believe that you sought refuge with us by sheer coincidence, notwithstanding we're the only people who can fulfill your desperate need to cross the border and escape this land. But of course.

Do we break the law? Clutch my heart, we're all a band of brigands! You still have so much to learn. The Georges don't want us in their world, and for once we share their opinion. Their law is not our law. If Isolde approves of a profitable venture—rather, unless Isolde specifically *forbids* a venture—then it's all right by us. Isolde has declared only two laws, and if you want to last long around here, you'll take them both to heart.

Law Number One: Do Your Part. We aren't your servants, George, and we aren't here to pamper you. Every man in the Carnival carries his own weight, and every woman does the same. Remember, there are no free rides.

That's right, George. We all have to do our fair share. There's a lot of work around here, and we're the only ones who are going to do it. If you're a Trouper, you perform. That brings in money, and money buys supplies from the Georges. Even Troupers need to eat! Well, except for a few acts who *can't* eat, so maybe that's not the best choice of words, but you get my point, right?

If you can't perform, or if performing isn't your only talent, then you do some other kind of work. You paint wagons. You cook up food at one of our booths. You mend banners. Even if you don't think you're good at anything, even if you happen to be the most useless waste of good meat that ever walked on two feet, we'll find something you can do and put you to it.

Of course, if you're a tag-along with a fat purse, you might be able to cut a deal and just pay us for the privilege of our presence. That's what many Georges like you end up doing if they want our help to escape a place. But one way or another, you'll pay for the ride. Understood? Good. That brings us to . . .

Law Number Two: Do No Harm. Now listen very, very closely, George, because if you ever choose to ignore this rule you'll live to regret it, and I do truly mean that. Isolde has made this law very plain, so I'll spell it out for you just as clearly:

- If you hurt a Trouper, you break the rule.
- If you bring harm to anyone under the protection of the Carnival—which includes Mongrels like yourself, by the way—you break the rule.
- Even if you just do something stupid to some George, and that stupidity comes back around and puts the Carnival in danger, you break the rule.

And, yes, this rule even extends to the creeplings. As ugly and annoying as they might be, Isolde extends the same protection to those little beasts that she has extended to you and me.

So what's the penalty for breaking the rule? That depends. If all you do is lose your temper and strike someone in anger, you might not be harmed, but you'll be outcast, and you'll never be able to come back to the Carnival. That's for Troupers and Mongrels

The Price of Freedom

Crafty heroes can use the Carnival to smuggle themselves in and out of dangerous lands, but they should expect to pay dearly for this service. The Carnival always charges absolutely as much as the market can bear. Heroes who fall into the habit of using the Carnival to rescue them from their own mistakes should quickly find themselves pondering whether it's better to be pinned or penniless.

Carnival Justice

If any character—Mongrel, Trouper, or George—ever harms a Mongrel or a Trouper in any way, then the culprit faces immediate punishment. For minor infractions, the punishment might be comparatively lenient: literally, ten blows received for every blow inflicted upon another. (The character being punished suffers 1d2 points per blow.)

More serious crimes demand incrementally more vicious punishments, and if anyone ever kills a member of the Carnival, the killer will soon find the entire Carny population hunting him or her down like a dog. Trust is precious to the Troupers, and when it is betrayed, even the kindest of Troupers can be utterly cold-blooded in taking revenge.

The Death of a Thousand Knives: Characters who commit dire crimes may suffer this common form of Carnival justice. Troupers describe it in especially lurid terms, hoping to scare listeners and dissuade them from doing anything for which they might deserve the punishment. The actual rite is almost as horrid. The evildoer is tied to a post or wagon. Each and every Carnival member who wishes to participate then takes turns delivering one swift stab or slash with a razor-edged dagger. The process is repeated until the evildoer is dead, or until every participating Carnival member has taken their turn (or two, or three), whichever comes later.

Even in this righteous frenzy, when the Troupers come closest to being the monsters they are so often accused of being, there is a hint of mercy. This is because the Troupers have no doubt that, however brutal their punishment may be, Isolde's is far more dreadful. Details on those who have faced Isolde's justice can be found in Chapter Three.

alike. Even if you're a gifted act, once you're cast out, from that point on, you'll always be just another George.

But let's say you kill someone—even a George. Then there's nothing that can help you. Most of our Troupers had been beaten down from the day they were born, and the home they have here at the Carnival is the one good thing in their whole lives. If you sully their home with death, then every Trouper here has a lifetime of resentment and anger to unleash on you.

You should know that some of us in the Carnival are well-rehearsed in performing a little act we call the Death of the Thousand Knives. Of course, that's if you're lucky. If Isolde catches you first, you'll pray for the easy out we would have given you. Don't get me wrong. I'm not some bastard looking to bring you pain; that might have been me once, but not for a long time, thanks to the Carnival. But I don't know you, George, and you must understand that this is not a game. In the last ten years, six people have brought death to the Carnival, and each time Isolde caught them before we could. If you want to know what she did to them, then maybe you should visit the Hall of Horrors sometime, and then think twice before you complain about the Twisting.

I thought you'd ask. But you'll learn about the Twisting soon enough, I promise you. In the meantime, just make sure you understand and obey our two rules, and you can pretty much do anything you want. So long as no one really gets hurt, Isolde doesn't really care what we do to support ourselves. And yes, that does include the Georges. Not everyone here hates them, after all; we just like to keep them where we can see them. And the sad truth is that, if you hurt a George that hasn't hurt you first, then you're no better than he is.

We've got all kinds of rackets going; a little gambling here, a little smuggling there, a little . . . like I said, use your imagination, George. If no one gets hurt, then you can find it at the Carnival.

THE TROUPERS' GALLERY

Ah, the sun is going down, and the last of the Georges are scurrying home to hide in their hovels. This is my favorite time of day; we set up the torches and the long tables and prepare for our nightly repast.

Tell you what; before the Troupers call it a day, I'll take you around and introduce you to some of our performers. Just like the wagons are the Carnival's meat and bones, the Troupers are its heart and soul. Just step back and allow me to do what I do best.

The art of barking is to emphasize and exaggerate, to turn every little blemish into a grotesque extravaganza! The trick is remembering it's all a matter of perspective; oddity lies in the eye of the beholder. Take the other Wisps, for example. They could walk past you on the street and you'd never glance at them twice, but put them up on a stage and allow to me to elucidate their most extraordinary attributes, and I can plant a grin on your lips or send chills down your spine. Bouncing wildly between extremes— that's how you pull in the Georges! You use whatever act you showed them last to build on the shock of the next.

You have to know your audience, too. Long before I joined the Carnival, in the very beginning, there was a wee little Trouper who stood no higher than a tabletop. His stage name was The World's Smallest Boy, and he was one of the originals, a survivor of the Puppet Show—may the Puppetmaster hang from his own strings. His whole career was built upon being the tiniest fellow you'd ever seen, and then one day the Carnival stopped at Mayvin, in Darkon. What do you know, but all of a sudden everyone in sight is his height! Those gnomes ruined his act!

Sad ending to that story: The fellow retired from the Carnival on the spot, and as far as I know, he still lives up in Mayvin. It's always sad when we lose a good Trouper to the Georges. Ten Georges strung together will never be worth a single Trouper.

Now I'd like to introduce you to a few of my favorite acts. Troupers come in every size and shape imaginable, and as you'll see, some of us veer precariously close to the *un*imaginable. One thing unites us, though, and that's Isolde. One way or another, she's saved each and every one of us from lives of misery. In some cases, the Georges imposed that misery. In a lot of others, Isolde pulled someone away from the dark path they'd been treading. I'll let you judge which of those two descriptions applies to our first performer.

Every Trouper has a special stage name—something lurid to burn his description into a George's minuscule mind—and this Trouper's name is so fitting, you'll guess it as soon as you see him. So, without further ado, feast your eyes on . . .

The Imp

Behold this handsome young man: so tall and well-shaped, and with such a pleasing profile. Surely he has broken the hearts of many damsels! Ah, but I hear you gasp as he changes his pose. Don't be embarrassed; everyone does when they see his flaw.

That wriggling tumor growing along the left side of his face, that loathsome creature clinging to his neck and shoulder, well, it's enough to turn a weak man's stomach. And yet, we can't help but look at it, can we? So go ahead and stare! Behold that singular lump of flesh with its limp, half-formed limbs, that drooling slash of a mouth, those wavering, mismatched eyes, and be glad you do not suffer the same companion! For *that,* my friend, is the Imp that the curious and the morbid pay to see!

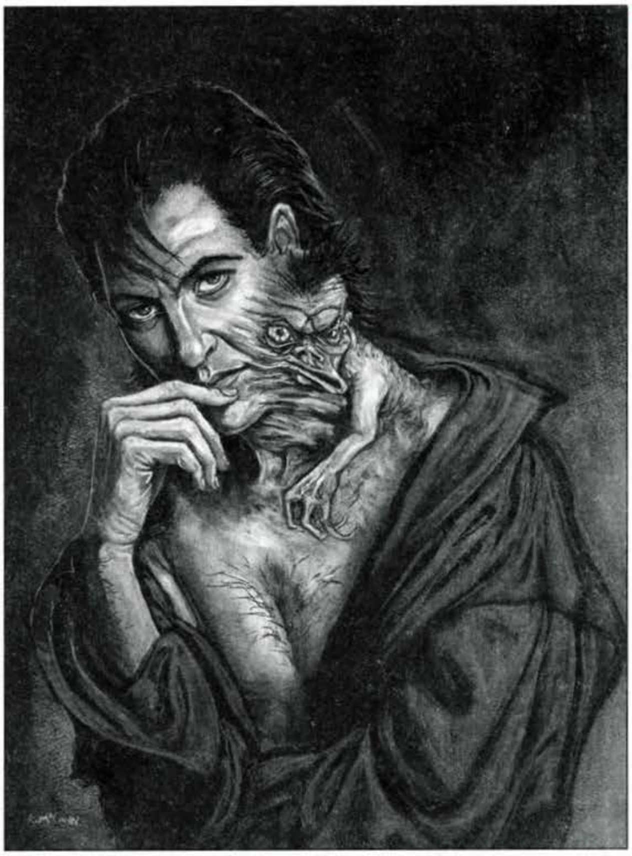
How did a young man of such pleasing demeanor come to be shackled to such a horror? Simple. It's his brother.

George, meet Claude. He's the handsome one. You'll find him a fast friend and an excellent listener, and when the Twisting gets its hooks in you, he'll talk you through the worst of it. That semi-formed

Trouper Charisma

While the Carnival members are quite accustomed to oddities and "exotic beauty," the startling appearance of most Troupers disturbs or even terrifies outsiders. That's why each Trouper detailed in this chapter receives two Charisma scores. The first score applies among members of the Carnival and jaded Mongrels, as well as among Seers (those kind souls who can look past the Troupers' often horrific visages). The second Charisma score applies when a Trouper interacts with common citizens or "Georges." In all likelihood the second score applies to the heroes when they first encounter the Carnival.

Some of the Troupers are Wisps, which means they can pass for "normal" whenever it pleases them. In such cases, the lower Charisma scores apply only if the Wisps reveal their true, freakish natures. Many Wisps enjoy catching Georges unaware and may reveal themselves suddenly for added shock value. Their sudden revelations are usually cause for horror checks.



appendage of his is quite mindless, I'm afraid, but Claude can see through its eyes; it's a gift from the Twisting. In fact, we build his whole act around that, and pass the Imp off as having its own identity. Claude wears a blindfold, and I have the Georges in the crowd hold up personal items. Then the Imp "whispers in Claude's ear," or so I cleverly claim, and blindfolded Claude tells the Georges what they're holding. A wee bit of puckery, I admit, but the Imp drives the crowd wild.

The Imp also drove Claude's parents wild. Claude was born to some well-to-do Georges in Mortigny back in 729. He was a beautiful baby, or he would have been—except for that fleshy bit of baggage on his face. His mother screamed when she first saw him. The doctor offered condolences and said that cutting away the growth would kill Claude himself. The local cleric was summoned, and his advice was even more disappointing. After much contemplation, he ruled that since the growth had its own head, it had its own soul, and therefore it would be evil to kill it. In fact, the cleric ruled they had to name both the growth and the baby to which it was attached!

Thus did Claude become Claude. Now, there's nothing unusual about the moniker, except that he's no "junior"; Claude's father refused to let his first son share his name. As for the growth, Claude's parents dutifully named it as well, calling it—or him, I suppose— "Importun." In the local dialect it means something akin to "unwelcome guest." Folks began calling Claude's brother the Imp long before he joined the Carnival.

Claude's childhood was no kinder than his birth. Thanks to his mindless, shapeless brother, he was treated as a monster and hidden away from decent folk. Naturally, he became surly and resentful. It was just when his rueful parents were starting to worry that Claude might be growing dangerously violent that the Carnival first visited their city. When he was sixteen, Claude's parents took their disturbed son to the Carnival—and that's where they abandoned him, washing their hands of him forever.

The rejection was more than Claude could take. He lashed out, trying to beat his way past the Troupers, who even then welcomed him to their family. He intended to vent his rage on his parents as they headed back to town, you see. And he almost succeeded. Claude grabbed a knife, but then Isolde came on the scene. She grabbed the boy's wrist, brought him up cold, and effortlessly plucked the blade from his white-knuckled grip.

Now, this was before my time, but from what I'm told, Isolde and Claude shared a singularly disjointed conversation after that. The Mistress stared deep into Claude's eyes, and then into the eyes of his brother. She asked him if he wanted to stay.

"Why would I?" Claude spat back.

"Then you may," said Isolde.

For a moment, or so I've heard, Claude's whole body stiffened, and his eyes went white with fear. But then he calmed down, gave a tired smile, and quietly thanked her. Isolde declared Claude's outburst had not broken Carny Law, and Claude has been with us ever since.

In all the time I've known him, he has never harmed a fly, but I'm certain that the old resentment still lurks behind his eyes. The boy can't hold his liquor, you see. He's only gotten soused twice that I know of, though, and the second time was the fault of some stupid George's puckery. A few sips o' the grape and Claude started shrieking about how the Imp had "enslaved" him. He even tried to cut off the Imp, but thankfully we stopped him before he could kill himself in the bargain. With that sort of outburst, I sometimes wonder if maybe the Twisting didn't dig into him further than he'll let on, but he's generally such an amiable fellow that I hate to pry.

From the puny to the mighty, I tell you now to tremble with awe at the sight of . . .

The Imp

To this day, the Imp continues to keep the secret it has hidden from the day it was born: *Importun is aware.* In the sixteen years before it came to Carnival, the Imp was trapped within its useless body and painfully aware that it was considered nothing more than an aberrant lump of flesh. Unable to express its thoughts to the outside world in any way, the Imp could do nothing but listen. It listened to the hateful comments hissed in its face, and it listened to the thoughts of its "big brother" Claude, as a life of rejection slowly sent him spiraling into bitterness and self-loathing. The more hatred that welled up in Claude, the sadder the Imp became, and the more worried.

It was just as the Imp was becoming afraid that Claude would act out his violent fantasies that his family abandoned the two brothers at the Carnival. When Claude surrendered to his mad rage, the "twins" found themselves facing Isolde. She looked into the Imp's eyes, and for the very first time in his life, someone kindly asked him a question in the hopes he would respond. When Isolde asked whether the Imp wished to stay, all the Imp could do was think, "Please."

At that moment, the Twisting took hold of Claude and his brother. Suddenly, the Imp could control Claude's body, and he could see through Claude's eyes as well as his own. It was the Imp who spoke to Isolde, using Claude's mouth to thank Isolde for her kindness. From that day on, the Imp has continued to control Claude's body, pretending that *he* is Claude. But Claude is aware too, and his mind remains active. The Imp can "hear" Claude's thoughts. Within his mental prison, Claude is screaming out rabid curses as he rails against his fate.

While Claude's natural personality is spiteful and violent, the Imp is patient and inquisitive. He has spent his entire life listening to others, and more than anyone else, the Imp knows what it's like to live in someone's shadow and to follow someone else's footsteps. When new Troupers come to the Carnival, or when Mongrels succumb to the Twisting, it is often the Imp's calm compassion that helps them find their way in their new life. (Of course, they know him only as Claude.)

The Imp also has an ear for languages; between the Troupers, at least a dozen tongues are spoken in the Carnival, and the Imp is fluent in virtually all of them. The exception is the language of the Illuminated Man. Not even the Imp has mastered that one.

While the "real" Claude remains fully aware of his surroundings, he is utterly unable to override the Imp's control. Any mind-affecting attacks directed at the Imp must be targeted specifically at Importun. Otherwise, they'll appear useless, since they can only affect Claude's already powerless mind.

The Imp's greatest weaknesses are alcohol and other sedatives. His tiny body simply cannot handle these substances, and for each exposure, the Imp must make a saving throw vs. poison with a –6 penalty or pass out. At these times, Claude regains control, and until the Imp revives, Claude's insane rage is freed once more. Naturally, the Imp tries to avoid imbibing such substances at all costs, but accidents have been known to happen.

Claude Rivale (Importun), human male, F2: AC 10; MV 12; hp 15; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA mental misdirection; SW alcohol; SZ M; ML steady (12); Str 12, Dex 11, Con 13, Int 10 (18), Wis 9 (14), Cha 7 (14)/7; AL CN (NG).

Note: Scores in parentheses represent Importun.

The Brute

Tosk is an orc, one of the few who can be found in domains of the Core. Hailing from the distant orcish Kingdom of Thar, he is fiercely proud of his heritage and will not hesitate to kill in order to defend his honor. In short, if anyone starts a fight with Tosk, they had better be prepared to end it.

After Isolde had her "conversation" with Tosk over his behavior, the orc gained an entirely new view of the Carnival's Mistress. He believes she is a goddess who has chosen him to be one of her champions. He will never reveal this to anyone but another orc, however.

The Twisting has enhanced Tosk's strength, and made his features even less human in appearance. This change went virtually unnoticed by the other Troupers, and the Brute's pride means he keeps his concerns over the changes to himself.

In addition to his already impressive fighting prowess, Tosk's unyielding loyalty to Isolde inspires him to enjoy a +1 bonus to any attack rolls or morale checks he makes when in her presence. However, he suffers a –1 penalty to any attack rolls or morale checks he makes when fighting in sunlight, which hurts his beady eyes.

Tosk, orc male, F8: AC 8 (leather armor); MV 12; hp 64; THAC0 10 (with Str bonus); #AT 3/2; Dmg 1d8+6 (battle axe+ Str bonus); SD infravision 90'; SW sunlight; SZ M; ML champion (15); Str 18/00, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 8, Wis 7, Ch 6/3; AL LN.

The Brute

This mountain of a man, with his mass of mammoth muscles, astounds the Georges daily with inhuman feats of strength. You're probably thinking the Brute could crush your skull with his bare hands, and you're entirely correct. In fact, for just five measly coppers you can buy a horseshoe that he's twisted into a knot! A little squeeze for us, and for you a little something special to show the folks at home!

Let me guess; you're eyeing his mottled, warty skin, that bristly hair on the back of his hands, and you're wondering what lies beneath the executioner's hood that covers his head. You're wondering whether his face could be any more gruesome than his hulking body. One word, George: *tusks*. You can see them poking out when he turns to the side. I keep telling him that his looks are an act all by themselves, but he refuses to put his snout in the show! I kid you not, the Brute's face looks like the worst parts of a human, an ape, and a boar all tied in a knot. But he insists that he's considered ruggedly handsome back home, wherever that is. I shudder at the thought. Assuming he's telling the truth, his homeland must be a long, long way from here, because I've traveled far, and I've never seen the likes of *him* before!

The Brute's real name is Tosk, by the way, but only the Imp calls him that. It just doesn't seem to fit. He wandered into the Carnival's camp one foggy night about five years ago. He was pretty tough then too, but he wasn't willing to go back out into those dark woods, so when we offered him asylum, he grudgingly accepted. Well, whatever strange place spawned him, apparently his people wander about in tribes, like the Vistani, and his tribe had a pecking order that I'd place second only to a pack of cur dogs. The Brute, delightful chap that he is, decided to carry this pecking order over to his new "tribe." He had no problems taking orders from Hermos, or from anyone else he considered his equal in raw physical power. But he was unapologetically cruel to anyone weaker than himself, and he absolutely refused to follow the commands of a "mere female" such as Isolde. His words, not mine.

Of course that situation wasn't going to last long, and we all knew it. We were just waiting for Isolde to make her move. After a few weeks, the Brute was starting to make quite a nuisance of himself. Then at dinner one night, someone said something the wrong way, and before we knew it the Brute had his big ax out and was challenging someone—anyone—to fight him to the death.

Naturally, it was Isolde who stepped forward. But she didn't fight him, luckily for the Brute. No, she just clamped a hand down on one of his ample ears and hauled him off squealing into the night, far enough so we couldn't see what happened next. We all thought the Brute was done for, and good riddance. But an hour later when Isolde strode back into camp, the Brute was tromping along behind her like a lovestruck pup. I don't know what she did to him out there, but he's become so respectful of her, I might go so far as to call him reverent! He's completely loyal to her, and since Isolde ordered him not to start fights, he doesn't. Simple as that.

I know a few Troupers around here—mainly Pacali's circle of associates—who grumble that Isolde snapped the Brute's mind, or that she's pulling his strings. I don't agree; the Brute's still a domineering ogre most of the time, so I wouldn't say he's changed. If anything, he just errs on the side of obedience now.

My opinion? I think the Brute respects power and only power. And I think that's exactly what Isolde showed him out in the darkness that night.

And now, from the allure of raw power, we turn our attention to the delicacies of fine art. Broaden your horizons and focus your eyes upon . . .

The Illuminated Man

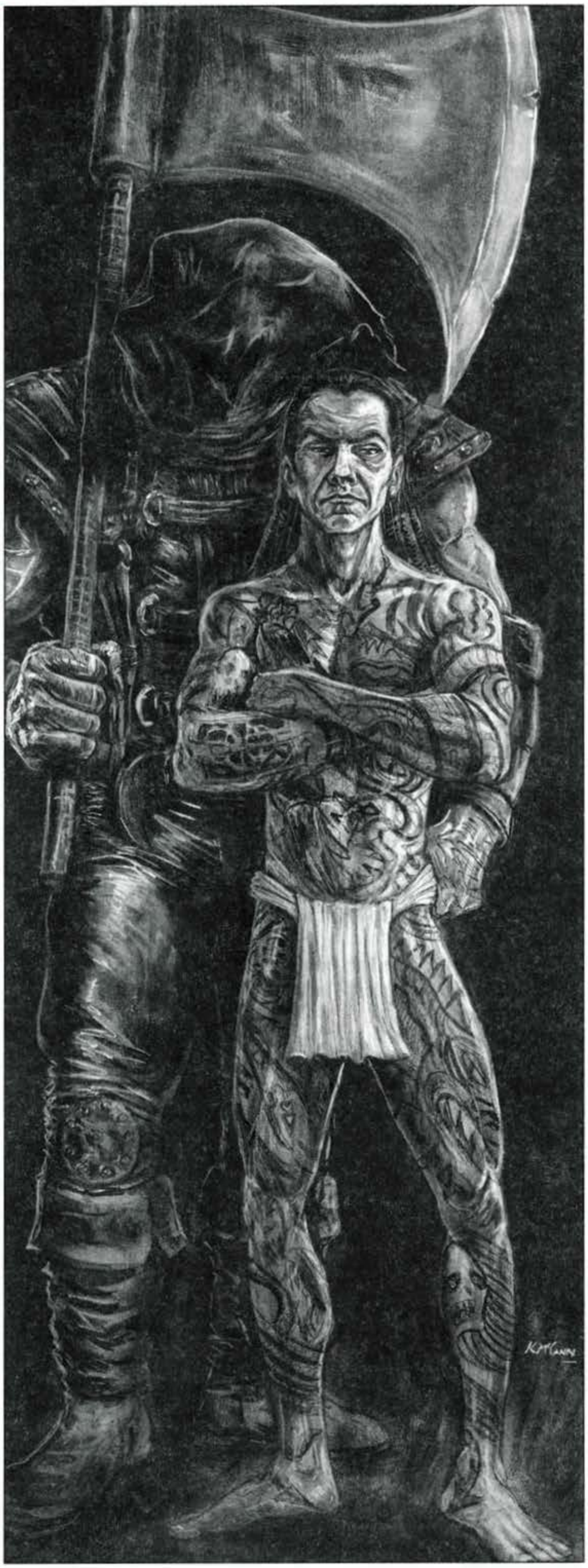
Sometimes I have to warn the ladies in the audience to steel themselves before this next act, because the Illuminated Man wears as little as decency allows. Funny thing is, it takes a moment or two for some Georges to realize that the Man isn't wearing anything but a colorful little loincloth, thanks to his tattoos.

Ah, but what tattoos! Each is a painstaking masterpiece of the needler's art, and the Illuminated Man is nothing if not covered in artwork—all done by his own hand, in fact. I hear lesser men have died from the pain of replicating his feat. I know; you're wondering how our gaunt friend here could possibly needle tattoos onto his own back. An excellent question, and one that is easily answered. Take a good, long look at the man's tattoos; examine the overlapping lines, the clusters of color. Now look away, take a deep breath, and look at him again.

That's right. The tattoos have moved. It can truly be said of the Illuminated Man that he is always has his friends nearby. . . .

He first came to the Carnival seven years ago, while we were was camped on the plains outside Arbora. You've probably never heard of his people, but the Illuminated Man—we call him "the Man" for short—is an Abber Nomad. His people hail from a wicked place called the Nightmare Lands. I suspect you don't know it, though, even if you've visited it. That's just one of the eerie qualities about the place: It prefers to be forgotten.

We don't know how it came to be that the Man was in Nova Vaasa. Maybe he'd been there since the time before the Great Upheaval, but for all I know he just walked there one day through the Mists. You must forgive me if I'm light on detail; although the Man seems to understand everything we say, I've never heard him speak a word that wasn't in that weird, clicking language of his, so learning about his past has been problematic. I can't even tell you his real name; whenever I hear it spoken, I feel like I've got beetles scuttling around inside my skull. Not even the Imp can understand him, and that's saying something!



When the Illuminated Man isn't performing, he's got a nice little squeeze doing tattoos for us Troupers and some Georges. Of course, the Georges have to pay. No, don't worry. The Man creates normal tattoos, not those semi-alive designs you see slowly swimming across his skin.

I take that back. *Most* of the tattoos the Man does for others are normal, but if he truly likes you, or if he truly doesn't, he may well give you one of his living pieces. Of course, there is a catch, George; you never get to pick the design of your tattoo. No, the Man just sleeps on it one night, and then he inks in whatever he chooses.

And now . . . from slithering shapes of one kind, cast your gaze upon sinuous, slithering shapes of another variety. Either way, they're works of art! And with that, I bid you meet . . .

The Snake Mistress

Oho! I can see she's captured your attention already! Lose yourself in that sinuous dance, wrap yourself in those curves—but don't get too close, George, for those serpents draped over her tempting figure have deadly venom in their bites!

This enchanting elf maiden is Silessa, and she originally hails from the domain of Sithicus. In fact, I met her through a colleague there, before either of us joined the Carnival. Yes, I am about to tell you a story, George. There's a reason those deadly snakes are so comfortable around her, yet would hiss and strike at you or me. It's because *she is one of them.*

That's right, Silessa began her life as a serpent, a rather deadly spitting asp to be specific. She was a familiar, and she belonged to a Sithican mage by the name of Sarlandril, the colleague I mentioned. As Sarlandril explained it to me after the fact, he'd heard stories from neighboring Valachan about some wizard who had turned a simple, dumb animal into a human servant. This piqued his curiosity, and he decided to attempt the experiment himself, performing the magic on his devoted snake. The results are quite impressive, don't you agree?

I've never seen a lovelier creature. Sarlandril taught Silessa the rudiments of what she needed to know to help him around his lab, but all in all I didn't care much for his treatment of her after she shed her reptilian skin. As far as Sarlandril was concerned, she existed solely to serve him. That sort of attitude might be fine when your familiar is an asp, but when she's an elfmaid?

It's positively shameful that I didn't do anything to stop his cruel treatment, but I was . . . well, let's just say I was preoccupied with my own experiments at the time, and I didn't act when I should have. After I joined the Carnival in '45, however, the very first thing I did was convince Isolde that we should travel to Sithicus to free Silessa from her master. I considered it my act of penance for earlier ventures in that land. Silessa has never warmed up to me, though; I suspect she still resents the years I could have helped her but did not. To my sorrow, I can't really disagree with her judgment.

The Illuminated Man

A fearless, stoic character, the Illuminated Man was once an Abber shaman in the Nightmare Lands. This much is known, but learning more about his past is difficult for Troupers and heroes alike.

He remains something of an outsider among the Troupers, and he was outsider among his own people too. His desire to understand the nightmarish forces that ruled his land led him to be cast out as a madman by the Abbers. Their actions simply freed him to delve ever deeper into the world of dreams. He learned the art of dreamwalking (as described in *The Nightmare Lands* boxed set), and through those walks, he saw the innumerable night terrors that haunt the sleeping minds of those who are drawn into the dreamscapes of his homeland.

In the years that followed his first dreamwalk, the Illuminated Man found a way to bind the night terrors within his tattoo designs. With each terror he traps on his skin, one fewer dreamer is plagued by harrowing nights. He has learned this skill in lieu of any ability to cast spells, and he shares his methods with no one. For each level he gains, he can bind a maximum of eight night terrors.

In many ways, the countless tattoos slowly swimming across the Man's body resemble the living tattoos described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM III*. However, the Man's tattoos are quite different in their exact nature, and in the way the Man acquires them.

The Illuminated Man, human male, P5: AC 10; MV 12; hp 13; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA unbound tattoos; SD bound tattoos; SZ M; ML 19; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 8, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 10/6; AL N.

The Night Terrors

While bound in a tattoo, night terrors are relatively harmless. Each represents a specific phobia, eerily portrayed by the tattoo's design. For instance, terror might represent a fear of spiders or darkness or blood. One tattoo might resemble a woman trying to pull fiendish bats from her hair, while another might show hideous claws scraping at a windowpane, or portray something more symbolic.

When the Illuminated Man binds a terror to someone else, he invariably creates a design representing the bearer's darkest fear, which he discovers by dreamwalking. By forcing this terror "into the light," the Illuminated Man robs it of the power to haunt its victim and creates the opposite effect, transforming the terror into a protective totem. A bound tattoo grants its wearer a +2 bonus against all fear and horror checks provoked by the corresponding source of fear. There is a small price: The bearer must permanently sacrifice a hit point to bind the terror to his or her skin. (The Illuminated Man has paid this price himself many times over; that's why he appears so gaunt, and at times even sickly.)

For example, a Trouper who is afraid of the dark asks the Illuminated Man to give him a tattoo. That night, the Man walks in the Trouper's dreams, finds the Trouper's specific fear of darkness, and captures it. The next day, the Man binds the night terror to the Trouper's skin as a swirling ebon tattoo. The Trouper then sacrifices a hit point to hold the terror, and from that point onward he enjoys a +2 bonus to all fear and horror checks prompted by darkness.

Though the tattoos which the Man creates for others are "living," they do not seem as active as the ones on his own body. They barely move at all. Once bound, night terrors can only be set free by the death of their owner, but they can be destroyed in the manner described below.

Unbound Night Terrors: If the wearer of one or more night terror tattoos is killed, the person's life-force ceases to imprison the terrors and they become unbound. Unbound night terrors remain trapped in the waking world as two-dimensional designs. They slip off their former host and, like leaves floating on the breeze, quickly flutter to the nearest sentient being (any creature capable of suffering nightmares). In short, the terrors attach themselves to a new host, with disturbing results.

Rather than acting as guardians, they now quietly wait for the new host to sleep. That night, and every night thereafter, an "unbound" night terror slips into the dreams of its host. The unearthly terror then warps the sleeper's dreams into vivid nightmares, forcing the host to make a horror check upon waking.

Each night terror causes a specific horror reaction. As DM, you should determine this result ahead of time (use your imagination, or consult Table 7: Failed Horror Check Results in *Domains of Dread*). The night terror continues the assaults nightly until either it or its host is no more.

The Illuminated Man has bound tattoos to many of the Carnival's Troupers, and even to a few fortunate Mongrels and even Georges. According to rumor, the Man also has inked a few *un*bound terrors upon the skin of Georges he found unworthy. . . .

Destroying a Night Terror: A night terror tattoo—whether bound or unbound—can be destroyed by spells or by a strike from a magical weapon aimed specifically at the tattoo. Night terrors only have 1–1 HD, and if the host is cooperating with the attacker, the tattoos are AC 9, so killing a night terror is a relatively simple affair. However, any attacks aimed at the tattoo also inflict full damage on the host.

As for Sarlandril, he's still out there, and he still wants Silessa back. Every once in a while, he hires some poor pack of idiots to try and "rescue" her from us. You aren't one of them, are you, Stranger? Good thing for you that you aren't. I worry for Silessa; her entire existence depends on nothing more than a simple bit of polymorphing magic. If Sarlandril's work is ever dispelled, she'll go back to being a simple

Sithican snake, and the Silessa I know, and love, will be gone forever.

She's still Sarlandril's familiar, you know; that mystical bond can never be broken. That's why we suffer that depraved Sithican to live; killing him would kill her too. Thankfully, Isolde has somehow devised some method of keeping Silessa hale and healthy despite her separation from Sarlandril. Don't ask me how Isolde does it; it's well beyond my understanding. All I know is this: As long as Silessa stays near the Carnival, she's fine, but if she leaves us for more than a brief time, she gets sick.

The Snake Mistress

In essence, Silessa is a Sithican asp polypmorphed into an elf maiden, but the change is so complete that she enjoys all the usual elven racial abilities. Thanks to the Twisting, she also exhibits traces of her serpent past. Three times a day, Silessa can spit venom with a range of up to 15 feet, and a +2 attack bonus. With a successful hit, she sprays venom into her target's eyes, causing blindness for 2d6 hours. Serpents and snakelike creatures consider Silessa one of them; they will not attack her unless provoked.

Tindal's history of this sly, sensual character is fairly accurate, with one notable exception: She was a pseudo-familiar. Such creatures are virtually indistinguishable from common familiars, but they are in fact evil entities devoted to tempting and corrupting their masters, enticing them to commit dark deeds. (For a combat summary, see the adventure scenarios at the end of this book. A complete description can be found in *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III.*)

Silessa's origin as Sarlandril's psuedo-familiar has not been entirely erased by either her master's magic or the Carnival's influence. Her spirit has changed as drastically as her body, but she cannot completely ignore the urge to egg her old master on, luring him into ever more drastic acts in his ongoing efforts to reclaim her, thus furthering his corruption. Under normal circumstances, a creature such as Silessa would lose 1 hit point a day whenever she was farther than a mile from her master. However, the Snake Mistress is strangely immune to this effect so long as she remains within sight of the Carnival.

Silessa tends a collection of about two dozen exotic serpents. She uses the snakes in her act, draping them across her lithe form as she entrances the audience with her undulating dances. Although most of the serpents are harmless, a few are extremely dangerous; at your option, a bite from one of her snakes could carry virtually any type of venom found under "Snake, Poisonous" in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome.

Tindal assumes Silessa is wary of him because of their shared past, and in a sense this is true. However, the reason Silessa keeps her distance around him is one that Tindal would never suspect: The Snake Mistress knows that the man who brought her to the Carnival is not the same man who consorted with her master. They merely share appearances. Until she can discover the truth regarding the Carny barker's identity, and learn why he pretends to be the mage she once knew, Tindal will remain a troubling mystery to her.

Silessa, elf female, W1: AC 7; MV 12; HD 3+1; hp 18; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (bite); SA venom, spitting; SD 90% resistance to sleep and charm spells; SW *dispel magic*; SZ M; ML steady (11); Str 11, Dex 17, Con 10, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 17/9; AL CG.

Notes: Although she is classed as a 1st-level wizard, Silessa cannot cast spells. She knows enough theory to be a good assistant, but she has never been trained in the arcane arts.

Wood'n-Head

This friendly, eccentric character is an eremite, a rare type of wizard. Instead of castling spells, Wood'n-Head brews potions to create magical effects, much like the alchemists of classic fantasy literature. For a complete description of the eremite character kit, consult *Champions of the Mists.*

It takes Wood'n-Head one turn to brew any given potion. Unfortunately, he is not overly proficient at his craft. In addition to their spell-like effects, most of his potions also carry temporary, minor side effects, such as rashes, hair loss, or sensitivity to light. His version of the *friends* spell is a weak "love potion" that grants the 2d4 Charisma bonus to the first person the drinker sees.

The regenerative elixir that Wood'n-Head was forced to drink has left him permanently immune to all slashing and piercing damage. His flesh simply seals around the blade or probe. However, he still suffers the full effects of all other forms of damage (bludgeoning, fire, poison, etc.), and he has no idea what would happen if one of his limbs were severed (he's not willing to experiment to find out).

Wood'n-Head's reaction to the regeneration formula appears to be a fluke; no one else who has sampled the elixir has survived the experience. The elixir seems to affect each imbiber in a different way. Should any heroes acquire and down the potion, let your imagination run wild when describing the hapless characters' demise: One drinker might melt into a puddle, while others might grow a new layer of tissue that hermetically seals their entire bodies, ultimately causing suffocation.

Wood'n-Head, human male, W2 (eremite): AC 10; MV 12; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SD immune to slashing and piercing damage; SZ M; ML 11; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 19, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 13/8; AL CG.

Spells (potions): enlarge, feather fall, friends, jump, shocking grasp, sleep.

One last thing. Travel with us long enough, and you'll hear two rumors about Silessa. The first is that she can spit venom, and the second is that she sheds her skin every spring. Well, I don't care to learn about the former, and the latter is entirely none of my business. And it's none of yours either, Stranger. Some things a lady is allowed to keep to herself.

From draped in scales to imbedded with nails, I now present you with one of our most peculiar performers, better known as . . .

Wood'n-Head

No, he's not dull-witted, my friends, but he likes this name just the same. Take a good look at this gangly young gent and see if you can guess his talent. Does his exotic garb provide a clue? His shaven head? Or perhaps those rings in his nose and ears? Ah, you're getting warm . . .

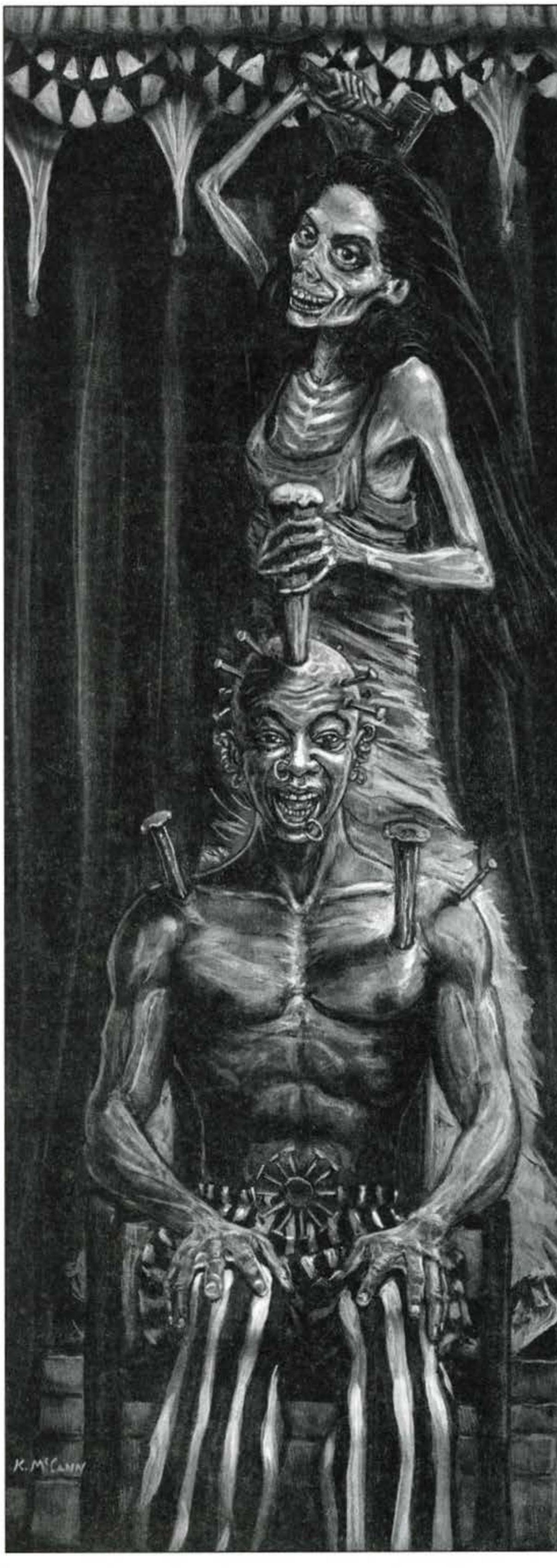
Wood'n-Head is an peculiar sort, but he's hard to dislike. He truly has the Carnival spirit, and he revels in his own oddities. Some Troupers came to the Carnival because they had nowhere else to go. Wood'n-Head stays with us because there's nowhere else he'd rather be!

Still haven't guessed his act? Watch carefully. Yes, he's about to tap that nail into his head. In fact, for just a single shining silver coin, you can tap a nail into his noggin yourself!

Yeesh. Now he's moving on to the truly grotesque. I hate it when he puts that pike in his eye. And I still get squeamish every time he throws himself on that bed of nails! You can imagine how the Reelers react. Sometimes another Trouper steps in and helps with the grand finale, strapping Wood'n-Head into some torture device—the iron maiden is always a crowd-pleaser. No matter what, Wood'n-Head just keeps on grinning. He never winces, he never bleeds, and after the show is over, he never has any marks or scars at all! I must say, that's just about all that separates his act from the torture sessions held daily in Falkovnia's dungeons.

What's the trick? Excellent question, but it takes some explaining. Wood'n-Head sought out the Carnival back in 743. A few years before that, he was apprenticed to a reclusive alchemist in Valachan. Two things were true of this alchemist: He had devoted years to the creation of a potion meant to regenerate damaged tissue, and when he thought he had it right, he didn't hesitate to force his unwilling young apprentice to test it.

So, the alchemist strapped Wood'n-Head into a chair—of course, Wood'n-Head had another name then, but he never tells anyone what it was. Anyway, then his master forced this vile, greenish concoction down his throat. The result was a bizarre transformation: Thanks to the potion, Wood'n-Head's flesh could instantly and painlessly seal around any sharp object that broke through the skin, and he would heal the moment the object was withdrawn. Tremendously pleased with these results, the villain brewed up another dose of his concoction and downed it



himself. From Wood'n-Head's description, the alchemist's demise was as messy as it was sudden, and Wood'n-Head no longer had a master.

Lucky for us, he sought out the Carnival, and he loves to show off his special "talent." It works out well for him too, because, between you and me, he didn't have much of a future as an alchemist. True, he does brew up quite a few weak little elixirs—he likes to squeeze the Georges with a little medicine show after his body-piercing act. But I suspect that the truly complex formulas are simply beyond him.

He won't like my telling you this, but Wood'n-Head does still possess his master's notes, including the formula for the miracle potion. Wood'n-Head tries to keep that a secret. Still, word has gotten out, and over the years a few Georges have even managed to steal Wood'n-Head's notes long enough to brew themselves a dose. Naturally, they all died a bad death. Rumor has it that at least one of those brigands started to morph into some sort of gangly, green monstrosity before he met his end.

Now, from the man who cannot die to the twin sister of Death himself, I invite you now to meet . . .

The Living Skeleton

I'd better warn you, George, we always lose a lot of Reelers with this next Trouper, even the ones who didn't flinch watching Wood'n-Head impale himself on every sharp implement known to man. This is Mola, our very own Living Skeleton, quite the sight at five-foot-six-inches while weighing a mere sixty-two pounds. The low-cut gown was my idea; shows off more of her bones without being too salacious, don't you think? Shocking and tasteful all at once, just the way I like it! You see that twitching in her chest? You're watching her heart beating against the inside of her ribs. Now, I'll admit I have seen a few characters walking about in worse shape than our Mola, but *their* hearts were no longer beating.

Mola joined up with the Carnival about five years ago, in Hazlan. She wasn't alone, though. She and her brother Rasulid were a couple of Mongrels from Rashemi—a pair of pick-pockets tagging along with us, lifting coins from the Georges and running a few crooked games. As long as they didn't bleed the Georges too badly and didn't get in the way of the real Carnies, Isolde looked the other way, and the rest of us didn't care.

I've shocked you again, haven't I? Well, that's what I'm here for. It's just how I told you, as long as no one really gets hurt, we don't care what you do. True, the petty theft was a bit unsavory, and we probably would have put an end to it after a while, but the crooked games? Those just play to the Georges' greed, so I say more power to the squeeze! Even if you do still find their actions distasteful, I wouldn't blame Mola; Rasulid treated Mola more like a lackey than a sister. Hrmm . . . grinder's monkey might be even more fitting.

The Living Skeleton

Mola Kravvan is little more than skin and bones—with very thin skin at that. Some of her friends call her "Shrinking Violet" because her personality matches her condition. She is rather shy and very polite, and remains eager to please her domineering brother.

Amazingly, Mola's extreme weight loss has changed her appearance but not her vitality; she remains as fit and nimble as she was when she first arrived at the Carnival. Nonetheless, some Troupers fear her health may suffer as she loses more weight. Though the wasting has gradually slowed, no one else has seen such a continual change from the Twisting. Her friends worry that Mola might be the first life claimed by its inexplicable, mutating effects.

For more details on this character, see "Gargantuan" (her brother) in Chapter Three.

Mola Kravvan, human female, 6th-level thief: AC 8; MV 12; hp 26; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M; ML elite (13); Str 11, Dex 16, Con 12, Int 12, Wis 9, Cha 14/7; AL N.

Thief Abilities: PP 70, OL 40, F/RT 20, MS 45, HS 25, DN 20, CW 85.

She was a raven-haired beauty then, and Rasulid would send her out to distract the Georges while he bled them dry. Or better yet, he'd have her bleed them dry while he just counted his profits.

Then the Twisting started seeping into them, and that changed everything. The Twisting has been a long, slow process for Mola and her brother; it took months for us to even realize it had set in. You see, Mola started losing weight. She's about sixty pounds lighter than she was when she arrived. And she's still losing about six pounds a year. That's where it gets a little skurry; she eats like a horse! Still, she keeps losing weight, while her lazy brother never touches a bite and yet. . . . You know, I think I'll let you discover Rasulid on your own. He's part of Pacali's crew in the Hall of Horrors. I guarantee you can't miss him.

Mola's beauty has faded away with the pounds, I'm afraid, but I think it's for the better. She didn't deserve to be reduced to a prop in her brother's schemes, and lately he tends to ignore her. One of these days she might even start to grow into her own person—figuratively, of course. But for now she still goes running whenever her taskmaster brother rings his bell. Such a pity.

And now, from Beauty to the Beast! Gather your courage, hold your loved ones, and clutch your children tight, for our next Trouper is a vicious killer! Look in fear upon . . .

The Hideous Man-Beast

Stand well back now, because when I pull the curtain away from this lock-box and the Hideous Man-Beast gets a look at your hide, all it's going see is its next meal.

Voila! Marvel in its savage strength; watch its sleek muscles play under its spotted pelt, and know that only a privileged few have ever gotten this close to such a savage monster and lived to tell the tale. Quite the fearsome creature, isn't it? No, George, we haven't pucked out some poor dumb leopard for our show—not unless you've seen leopards that can pace back and forth on their hind legs! Or reach out at you between the bars of their cage with their taloned, flesh-rending hands . . .

I warned you to stand back! But don't worry, as long as you do, he's not much of a threat. At least not to you, George. That's a personal note. You see, when I look into those beady yellow eyes, what ties my tongue is that this is the man that won Silessa's heart away from me. Will I explain? Ha! You couldn't stop me if you tried.

Isolde captured the Hideous Man-Beast about two years before Silessa and I arrived. The Carnival was camped in the grassy plains of some place called the Wildlands. On this particular day, while the Troupers were minding their own business, a pack of savage, half-human, half-leopard creatures swarmed the camp; creatures identical to our dear Man-Beast here. Naturally, all the Troupers ran for cover—all but Isolde, that is. She just strode right into the middle of the pack and with one swing of her pearly sword, she cleanly removed the head from the shoulders of the largest and most vicious of all the leopard-beasts.

This took the fight out of the rest of the pack, and all the other creatures turned tail and loped back off into the tall grasses just as fast as they could—all except for this fine specimen, that is. Seems this one just flailed about the campsite in a panic. The Troupers were trapped under a wagon, and everyone was expecting Isolde to finish the monster off. Yet she just gave it a long look, and then she told the others to haul the beast into a lock-box!

Most Troupers know an entertaining oddity when they see one, and as I understand it, by the time they got the beast locked up, they were already throwing out names to put on its banner. Ah, but you haven't even guessed at the true marvel in the Man-Beast's nature yet, and neither did the Troupers for nearly a month.

Weeks later, after the Carnival had moved on to some other land, on a night when the full moon just so happened to be hanging in the sky, a Trouper went out to toss the Man-Beast some meat for his supper. Well, imagine his surprise when, instead of the Hideous Man-Beast in that cage, he finds a man!

That's right, George, the Man-Beast is a lycanthrope, and a very special breed too. How is he special? Open your eyes, my friend! Do you see a full moon? No! No, indeed, for every day and almost every night of the month, the Man-Beast is just as you see him now, a leopard-man and a feral killer. But on those nights when the full moon rises, his bloodlust fades, and he reverts back into a simple man, like you or I. Well, maybe more like you.

His name is Raja Singh, and he was among the first explorers from Sri Raji to investigate the new wilderness when it appeared in the wake of the Great Upheaval. He also was among the first groups to be savaged by the Wildland's bestial inhabitants. Singh survived, of course, but not without consequences. Like other survivors of a man-beast's attack, he

The Hideous Man-Beast

The Hideous Man-Beast is an infected lycanthrope, but his attacks cannot infect others; only true wereleopards can pass on the dread disease to their victims.

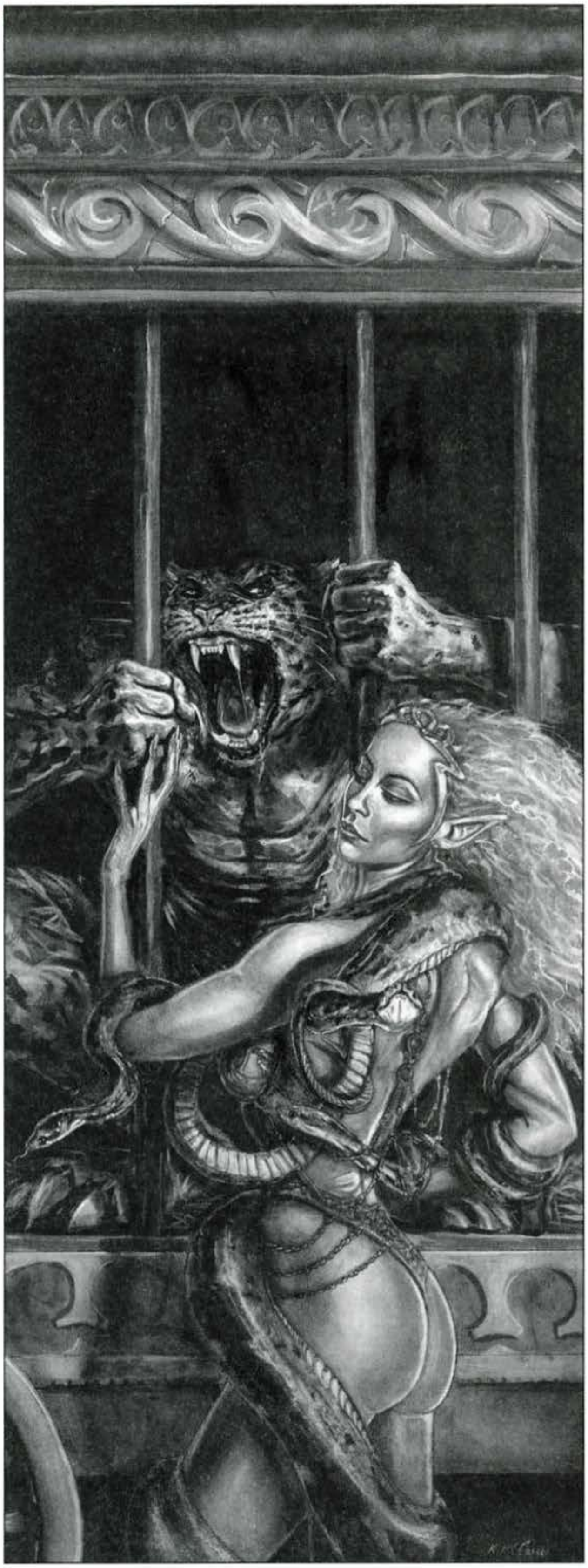
If the Man-Beast is freed from his cage while in bestial form, he will instinctively hunt for prey. He prefers to strike from behind, ripping the tendons in the back on his victim's leg. When striking this way, the Man-Beast enjoys a +4 bonus to his attack roll, and a modified attack roll of 18 or better indicates that he has hobbled his victim. Hobbled characters move at half their usual speed until the damage is healed.

Wereleopards fear lightning, and Raja spends so much time in this bestial mindset that the phobia affects him at all times, even when he reverts to human form. When presented with lightning or electrical attacks, he must make an immediate fear check with a –4 penalty; if he fails, he flees in terror for 5d4 rounds.

While Raja claims that he hails from Sri Raji, strange, discordant memories secretly make him unsure of his true identity. When he was first captured, his recollection of his former life was vague at best, though it has improved somewhat over the years. He still retains the haunting memory of a full moon over the Wildlands, a phenomenon not seen since the Steaming Lands cluster was formed. Raja has studied lycanthropy at every opportunity, and has learned that werebeasts always take the form of feared predators. Asking himself what predator could have been more feared in the Wildlands than humans, Raja is left begging the question: Is he a man who was turned into a leopard, or a leopard who turns into a man? Silessa knows of Raja's inner turmoil, and can sympathize; above all else, this is the bond that holds them together.

Raja Singh, infected lycanthrope/wereleopard (human male): AC 5 (10); MV 18 (12); HD 5; hp 32; THAC0 15; #AT 3 (1); Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6 (by weapon); SA hamstring; SD silver or +1 magical weapons to hit; SW fear of lightning; SZ M; ML steady (12); Str 18 (13); Dex 19 (12); Con 16 (11); Int 6 (12); Wis 3 (14); Cha 0 (13); AL LE (NG).

Note: Parenthetical scores apply to his human form.



suffered a terrible transformation. He turned into the monster you now see before you, and he remained in that state for three years, until the Carnival captured him. Funny thing. The Steaming Lands have no moon to set him free.

Watch your words in the Man-Beast's presence, George; I know I have to. He can hear everything you say, and when he changes back with the next full moon, he'll remember it too. Sometimes it comes in handy. We've discovered more than one traitor that way.

Ah, yes, Silessa. When I brought her to the Carnival, the Hideous Man-Beast was pacing his cage, just like he's doing now. I don't know what she sees in him; a kindred spirit, perhaps, someone else trapped in a form not their own, or maybe she thinks he understands her own fears about reverting to a simple beast.

Just look at him: All month long he's trapped in the body of a nearly mindless creature. But when he's human, he knows the love of Silessa, and for that, despite everything, I can't help but envy him. I'd gladly spend every remaining day of my life in that cage if only Silessa would sit by the bars and tell *me* tales at night! If only when the next full moon rises, she would reach through those bars and—I think I may have said too much. It's time to move on. Time indeed . . .

Now I shall take you into the dark realm between life and death, but have no fear! I assure you countless wards and rituals keep these unliving fiends at bay!

At least, that's how I'd build into our next acts for the regular Georges. For you, I'll explain a bit of the puckery. All Troupers are odd, but some aren't what they claim to be. Follow me to this wagon with all the curtains, and I'll show you what I mean. Behold!

The Vampiress

Oh, I love it when you Georges scream! Every single time I whip that curtain back, every single time the Vampiress lunges forward, hissing at the crowd, held back only by those meager shackles, and every single time the Vampiress spreads wide her vast, leathery wings, we always end up breaking out the smelling salts for some fluttery Reeler. It's grand!

Stranger, meet Amelia. Amelia, meet our new Mongrel. Yes, our fearsome Vampiress is just another Trouper, but it's good to see the shock in your eyes. It means both Amelia and I have honed her act well. Yes, we've used a bit of puckery at your expense. Certainly, that raven hair, her porcelain skin, and of course those glorious bat wings would all make our darling Amelia quite the convincing bloodsucker on their own merits, so perhaps you're right that the black satin and lace isn't needed. Very well, I'll even admit that the berry juice staining her lips might be going to extremes. On second thought, of course not!

I'll tell you a secret. Offstage, lovely Amelia is as far from a nightmare as one can get, isn't that right, my dear? Don't worry about her shackles, George, she keeps the key in her own pocket. She's one of the originals, you know, and the Troupers from the Puppet Show tend to be very particular about their freedom.

What? You want to know more about the Puppet Show? Some of our Troupers, the "originals," used to belong to that group. But not by choice, you see. The Puppet Show was like a prison, and the Puppetmaster held the key. The Troupers were sent there to be punished for their "crimes" and "misdeeds"—which were truly nothing—and transformed into freaks as punishment. Cruelly, they were also robbed of the memories

The Vampiress

Before the Twisting, Amelia's wings were stunted and useless, but they were small enough that she could hide them underneath a cloak, disguising them as nothing more than a slight hump. Today she has a 20-foot wingspan, but not once has she ever regretted her inability to conceal her gift of flight. When not playing her stage role, she is a cheery, optimistic character.

Each time the Carnival arrives at a new campsite, Amelia may be called upon to scan the surrounding area from above. Locals who happen glance up often speak of "bat-winged fiends" that grace the skies just before the Carnival makes its presence known.

Amelia can fly uninterrupted for three hours, although she has rarely covered such distances. After three hours, she must rest for at least 30 minutes before she can continue. She can travel for roughly ten hours in this fashion, but then she needs a good night's sleep, just as if she were hiking on the ground. If she cannot rest sufficiently, her movement rate drops to 15 and her maneuverability becomes Class D. She cannot push herself in this fashion for more than two days in a row.

Amelia can carry up to 50 pounds of equipment in a specially made pack on her chest, but if the weight exceeds this limit, her speed falls to 12 and her maneuverability becomes Class D. She can carry up to 75 pounds maximum; if the weight is greater, she cannot become airborne.

Amelia, 0-level human female: AC 7 (Dex bonus); MV 12, fly 18 (C); HD ½; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SZ M; ML elite (13); Str 10, Dex 17, Con 14, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 14; AL NG.

MISTER ?

"Mister Question Mark" suffers from a perpetual identity crisis. He —or *it*, as he's technically sexless—is a wax golem, able to sculpt and mold himself into another character's form. In his "normal" state, he appears to be a completely hairless, genderless, humanoid doll the size of a man, but he is not comfortable with that form. His personality, if one can call it that, is bland and emotionless, except for a pervasive sense of emptiness and a yearning for something more. And that's what drives him. When he admires another character, Mister ? feels compelled to become that person. Unfortunately, he does not stop at mimicry. To gain a new identity, he "borrows" memories, leaving the object of his admiration a mindless shell. He means no harm by his actions; he simply does what he does, instinctively.

In combat, electrical and cold-based attacks have no effect on this creature. However, magical fire causes his waxy features to melt, revealing his inhuman nature. His unnatural strength makes him a dangerous opponent: His barehanded punches inflict 2d6 points of damage each. When using a melee weapon, he gains a +4 bonus on all damage rolls. But Mister ? does not have a violent disposition, and when pressed, he usually resorts to using his unique mental drain.

To drain someone's memories, Mister ? must have a firm grasp on his victim. Achieving this requires a successful attack roll (assuming the victim is unwilling), but the grip itself causes no damage. Once Mister ? has latched on to his target, the victim must make a saving throw vs. death magic each round. A failed save means that Mister ? has drained away one experience level. As the victim loses all the memories and abilities associated with that level, Mister ? gains them. If the victim is drained to 0-level, he or she falls unconscious and, when roused, has total amnesia. Meanwhile, Mister ? copies the target's form and thoughts perfectly—so perfectly that he becomes convinced that he actually is the original model. At that point, he does not understand why he has a double, and he finds the whole matter highly suspicious.

While impersonating someone, Mister ? changes his ability scores to match those of his model. He also can mimic any racial and class abilities that are not divinely granted (such as a priest's spellcasting ability). On rare occasions, his subconscious mind may assert itself; when he's threatened, he momentarily regains his true, powerful strength (assuming his model is weaker).

Fortunately for his victims, Mister ? has an imperfect grasp on stolen memories. The amnesiac automatically regains one XP level per week; Mister ? can do nothing to prevent this. As the victim regains his levels and memories, they simply slip out of Mister ?'s grasp. The golem slowly reverts to his waxy, featureless true form. This is especially traumatic in the early stages of the process, when he still believes himself to be the person copied.

Mister ?, wax golem: AC 4; MV 12; HD 8; hp 48; THAC0 13; #AT 1; Dmg 2d6; SA memory drain; SD immune to electrical and cold-based attacks; SW magical fire; SZ M; ML fearless (19); Str 18/76; Dex 10; Con 16; Int 10; Wis 7; Ch 4/2; AL N.

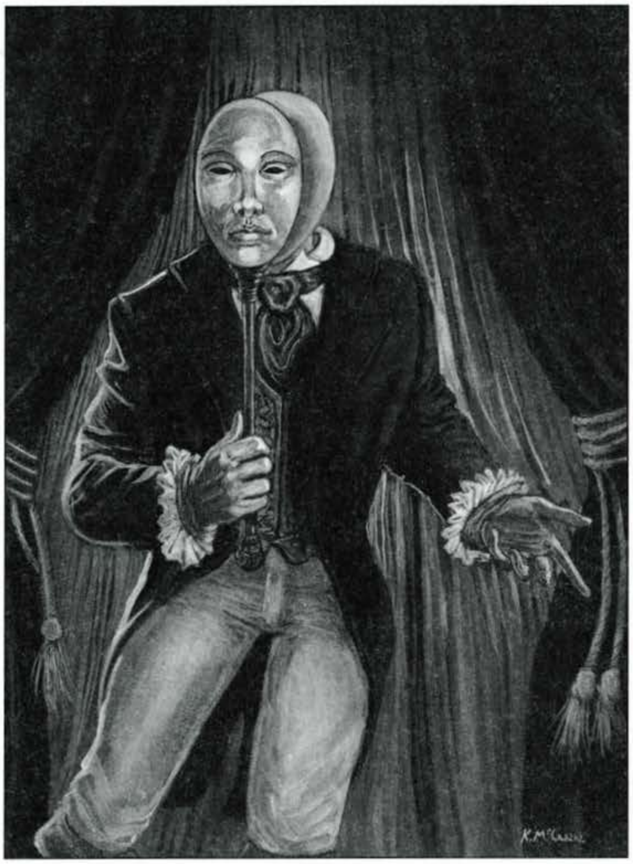
Notes: When Mister ? steals a victim's memory, his basic ability scores change to that of the new identity.

of their former lives, and most of them never did learn what they'd done to earn such a fate.

Amelia is one of the lucky ones, you know; she was one of the few who did learn why she'd been tied to the Puppetmaster's strings. Her great crime? She tried to run away from home when she was nine. Nothing more. For that, her parents had her trapped her in the Puppet Show, where she gained a pair of stunted, useless wings so she'd never forget that she wasn't going anywhere.

But when Hermos helped overthrow the Puppetmaster and led the fugitive freaks through the Mists, Amelia's story became miraculous. Right after Isolde joined with the Troupers, and the Carnival that you see around you began to take shape, Amelia was the first to be affected by the Twisting. Her stunted wings, those flaps of dead weight that had dragged her down for years, started to blossom. They grew, and they strengthened, and they straightened, and George, you really should see Amelia soar. When the Troupers first saw her take flight, they knew their lives had been changed forever.

For the record, the Carnival doesn't have any real undead in its ranks. Except maybe the Skurra, but we already talked about them, didn't we? Why don't we harbor any undead, when we give shelter to so many other "horrors"? I could give you any number of answers, but the main one this: Isolde just doesn't seem to have much patience for them. She's quite willing to give living souls such as you or I the chance to turn their lives around, but I suspect she believes that once you're dead, the time for repentance has passed.



It's time to move "beyond the pale now," George. There's no puckery involved with this next Trouper, but that doesn't mean he's any less astounding. If you thought of the Troupers you've met so far were strange, well, George, our next performer is the very definition of the word! With no further ado, I introduce you to . . .

Mister ?

Mister ? is another act we keep hidden behind a curtain like Amelia, but while the Vampiress' shock is enhanced by a sudden appearance, the enigma of Mister ? is strengthened by a quick exit. That's Mister ? in the refined clothes of a gentleman, by the rack of porcelain masks.

Ah, so you see a mask he's wearing, and you wonder about the face beneath! Is he hideous, like the Brute, or is his mask just puckish finery? Don't bother asking Mister ?; he's not much for conversation.

Mister ?, could you please show us what you've got hidden under there? Never seen anything like it, have you, George. Normally, we drop the curtain just after Mister ? removes the mask. We give the Georges just a moment's glimpse and leave them fearfully doubting their own senses. But you can stare all you like. I assure you, that's no second mask: What you see is what you get, and you hardly see a thing.

Mister ? has no ears, yet he can hear. He has no eyes, yet he can see. No nose, no mouth, no features of any kind. Under that wig, his head is nothing but a waxy, pinkish egg. In fact, when we dubbed him "Mister" we could just as well have called him "Miss"; his whole body is as featureless as a candlestick. But as they say, the clothes make the man!

You want to know how a man can live when he has no face? Simple. Mister ? is no man, George. He isn't human, and he never has been. About a year after I came to the Carnival, we stopped in Dementlieu. Isolde vanished for an entire afternoon, but there was nothing unusual about that. Happens all the time. This time, though, when she turned up again, she had Mister ? in tow. I admit, in the beginning we found him as strange as you probably do now, but he has grown on us.

We don't know where Isolde found him, exactly. Naturally she won't say, and Mister ? has no memories that precede his joining the Carnival. For that matter, he doesn't have much of a personality, either. Most of the time, he just haunts the camp, following people around and watching them in perfect silence; I imagine it's not overly difficult to hold your tongue if you lack a mouth. But you have to be a bit careful around Mister ? If he thinks that you're kind or interesting, he's likely to show his affection by stealing your identity. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, is it not?

None of us quite knows how he does it, but he copies a person's form and gets their memories and thoughts, too. The particularly peculiar part is that he fully believes that he's actually the person he's imitating, completely forgetting who and what he really is. More than once, that has led to some very sticky situations!

Fortunately, he doesn't truly *steal* people's identities— he just *borrows* them for a time. No matter what he does or tries, those memories always trickle back to the true owner. And as the owner slowly regains his identity—or as *she* regains hers, as the case may be—poor Mister ? slowly returns to his own unsatisfying and featureless self. The process is difficult for both of them.

Well, it's always great fun to shock you Georges, but I know a certain question has been pinching your tongue since we met. Am I right? You want to know about me, and whether I'm Twisted like the others.

Fair enough. Step right this way, and let me lead you to my miraculous mirrors. Yes, the quaint collection of standing mirrors I keep leaning against my wagon here. Let your keen eyes study their distorted reflections, and tell me what you see. Tall and thin? Short and squat? Wriggling like a worm? Yes, my mirrors can show you all of that. But look closely, George. Study the Carnival in my silvered glass, and tell me the one thing you don't see.

That's right. You don't see me. That's why I'm called . . .

The Amazing Soul-Less Man

My secret is revealed, as if I ever kept it hidden. I am not just a mere barker, singing the Carnival's praises. I too am a Trouper, through and through, although in my subtle way you could call me a Wisp. My mirrors never lie, they just distort the truth, and as they clearly indicate, I have no reflection. Lost my shadow as well when I came to the Carnival.

Don't look so pale, George—I've already told you the Carnival has no undead. But do you know why vampires have no reflection? No? Sigh. I still have so much to teach.

Some people believe that mirrors show not a reflection of the real world, but rather offer a window into the realm of the spirits. Their theory is quite correct. Folks from Mordent are particularly detailed in their tales of the "Other Side," as they call it, and they claim that everything has its equivalent in the spirit realm. Except for vampires, of course. No soul, no reflection, you see. That's because your reflection is actually a "fetch," your spirit double. Does the thought of every mirror, every reflective surface peering into an unearthly netherworld disturb you? Yes, I thought it might, but never fear. Your fetch won't cause you any problems . . . provided it likes spending a lifetime mimicking your every move, of course.

You still look perplexed, so I'll go back to the beginning of my tale. It all started with the mirrors. I created the warped reflections in the mirrors you now see here on display, using the simple trick of distorting the glass. But I wanted to do more—that's always been my weakness. I wanted to create mirrors that would show me wonders I'd never seen before. That's when I started to study the secrets of sorcery. You wouldn't know it from the simple little card tricks and handkerchief puckery I perform for the Georges now, but in my prime I was a master of the occult art of illusion. I've since sworn off my true magic; it led me down a dark path.

The Amazing Soul-less Man

Tindal is a bombastic cynic. He has a tall, wiry frame, and his lip is invariably curled into a smirk. In his role as a barker, he wears a black top hat over his wild mop of curling black hair, and dons formal black and gray garb that makes him appear a bit more like an undertaker than a ringmaster. He carries a thin, knobby cane and twirls it about when speaking; when necessary, he uses it as a weapon in his own defense. Although the thin wood should snap under a forceful blow, its seems invulnerable, and causes damage as a quarterstaff.

Troupers consider it likely that Tindal's "mere barker's cane" is in fact some powerful relic from his former days of sorcery, now cloaked in illusion. Aside from its unnatural sturdiness, there is no evidence to support these beliefs, and Tindal is always evasive if asked.

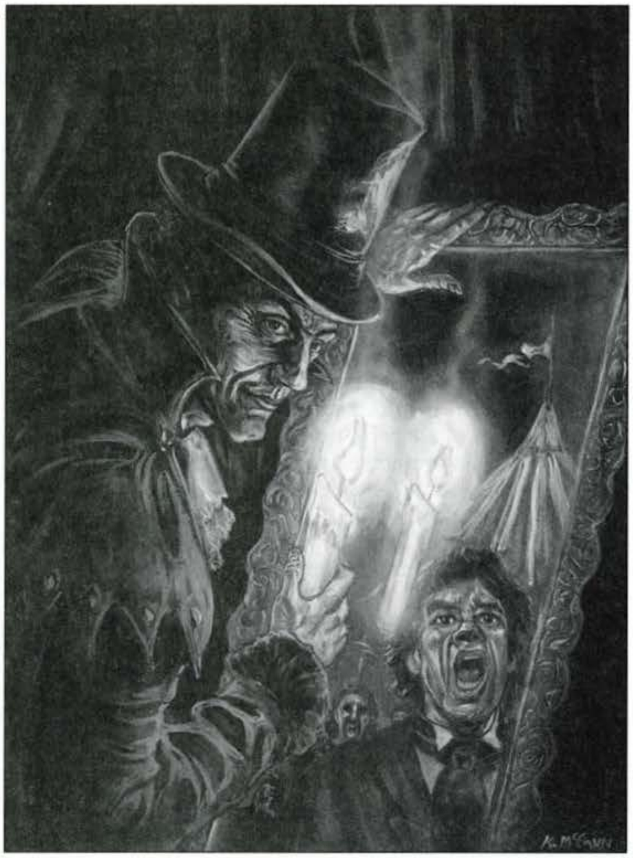
It is common Trouper knowledge that Tindal was an illusionist, but determining his exact level of power has proved difficult. Tindal has forsworn the use of his true magic, and he destroyed his distorted spellbooks shortly after coming to the Carnival. Now he confines his "illusions" to sleight of hand. He excels at legerdemain, however, and with a successful use of his Pick Pockets skill, he can perform any conceivable trick with cards, coins, or other small props.

For more on Tindal, see "Tindafulus" in Chapter Three.

Tindal, human illusionist, indeterminate level: AC 9; MV 12; HD 16; hp 38; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SZ M; ML elite (13); Str 13, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 13, Cha 15; AL N.
Thief Abilities: PP 85.

My first magical mirror was little more than a curiosity; its glass showed whatever had stood before it exactly one minute earlier. Later, I created a kind of mirror that showed people at their very worst. I have several still, right there to your left. Stand before them, and you'll see every physical flaw subtly enhanced, every petty little thought apparent in your face. Not interested, George? Maybe later then. The mirror I created next—the one to your right—was designed to always reflect your true self, no matter what guise you might hide behind. And I didn't stop there.

My next mirror marked the beginning of my fate. The irony is, at the time, I thought it my crowning achievement. Its reflection showed you in your absolute best light, your every noble feature exemplified, your every crude characteristic cleansed. It created beauty in the eye of any beholder!



Some time later, I was traveling through Sithicus when I was captured by the local lord, who somehow had learned of my accomplishments. I feared for my life, but my captor presented himself as a very eager, very powerful client who offered me enough funds to support decades of magical research. All I had to do was create another magical wonder for his benefit. His request was specific; fulfilling it was exhausting, and took me six years of labor. But my experiments were successful! I created six mirrors that could show their owner anything he wanted, mirrors that could create entire illusory dreamworlds at their owner's command. They were a masterpiece, even if they did eventually lead to ruin. I can't say I weep for him; my client sent his bloodthirsty little toady to silence me, and I was forced fake my own death to escape. I lived, of course, but my mirrors nearly destroyed Sithicus. The treasures my client had supplied were enough to fund my next endeavor, which would surely be my greatest challenge!

Time and again I returned to the mirror that showed me at my finest. I dreamed of making the reality within the glass my own. If my plan worked, I would no longer be dabbling with mere illusions; I would physically draw my better self from the mirror's reflection and make it me in every way! I would become my own ideal!

After months of experimentation, I was prepared for the rite. I stood in my tower, staring deep into the Mirror of the Ideal, and I spoke the words of power. In that instant, the mirror blazed with blinding light, and a great and terrible force tore at my very soul! Mercifully, I lost consciousness.

When next I woke, I was still lying on the floor of my laboratory. Quickly examining myself, I found to my great dissatisfaction that I was still my old self. In a foul mood, I stormed over to my spellbooks to start studying what had gone wrong, but to my shock I found I couldn't read a word of my own writing!

I first thought that the magical backlash had singed my mind, but it didn't take me long to realize why I couldn't decipher my books. I took one of them to the mirror, intending to hold my notes to the glass and thus read their reflection. That was when I first saw that I had been changed, after all. I had become the Amazing Soul-Less Man. I had no reflection at all.

Of course, that wasn't the worst of it. As I stood in my laboratory, my spellbooks still lay scattered across my table, and the outer door remained shut. But the mirror told a different story entirely. In the reflection, the books had vanished, and the outer door hung strangely ajar.

That was when I swore off meddling with such powerful magic. After a while, I stumbled across the Carnival and started my new life, my chance for redemption. I feel safe here under Isolde's protection, but I still worry about my missing reflection. You see, I do still have a reflection, somewhere. I'm certain of it. Those missing books tell the story: The fetch simply gathered them up and fled! He's still out there, somewhere, in the world on the other side of the glass. But I don't know where he went, and I can't help but fear that I've offended him. Which leads me to a twisted little problem. If he is a reflection of *me* before my redemption, well . . . let's just say I was not very kind then. And I was especially hard on those who offended me.

What? Tired of meeting Troupers already? But you've barely met a quarter of our number! Well, I guess you have had your coppers' worth. And I can see you're dying to know how we Troupers got to the state we're in. So I'll tell you a bit about the Twisting.

THE TWISTING

Clearly, it has not escaped even your meager attention that everyone here in the Carnival is . . . shall I say, abnormal? Here's the truth of it: Sooner or later, every Mongrel becomes a Trouper. Even you.

Link up with the Carnival, and it's just a matter of time before your body starts to warp. Soon you'll be one us, George! In fact, the process started the moment you walked into our campsite, and if you don't care for the thought of sharing our company for the rest of your days, I recommend you keep your visits with us brief.

Don't worry, you aren't doomed. The Twisting changes; it doesn't destroy. There are those who'll

The Twisting

The Twisting affects every living creature that comes in contact with Carnival—good or evil, human or otherwise. Fortunately, the effects can only be seen after extended exposure. Heroes and nonplayer characters can stay with the Carnival for 5+1d8 days before the Twisting becomes evident; then the character's body begins to warp.

Some Troupers guess that the Twisting is why Isolde keeps the Carnival forever on the move, seldom staying in any one spot for more than a few days, and never for longer than a week. Were the Carnival to permanently settle in one location, all the life nearby, presumably even plants, would begin to transform.

The Twisting reaches into the hidden depths of its victims' souls, using what it finds there to reshape their bodies. In a way, the effects of the Twisting resemble powers checks gone mad, warping bodies to reflect inner flaws. However, the Twisting affects everyone.

Virtually everyone who undergoes the Twisting shares this experience: *they become monstrous in the eyes of Ravenloft's common denizens.* This effectively halves a Twisted character's Charisma among "Georges" (rounding down), and may even inspire horror checks.

For the most part, the Twisting creates freakish features or talents where none existed before. However, characters who were already malformed in some way may discover that their "ailment" has become more useful. The price for this boon: the deformity also becomes more noticeable, and is impossible to disguise.

The Twisting always offers benefits to balance the drawbacks. Characters never becomes so badly Twisted that they can no longer function, although some may have to learn new ways of accomplishing tasks they once did with ease. *A Twist should not rob a character of his or her vital abilities;* a mage should not lose the ability to cast spells, for instance. Typically, the Twisting enhances a character's areas of interest, albeit to a freakish extreme. The Twisting changes, it doesn't destroy.

A sampling of possible Twistings appears in *Table 1,* with each effect listed beneath the personality quirk that might prompt it. A complete description of each result immediately follows. For quick results when creating a Twisted nonplayer character make random rolls and consult the table: Roll 1d20 for a direct result, or roll 1d10 to determine the personality "flaw," then simply choose one of the two options provided.

Note, however, that the Twisting never manifests in precisely the same way twice. Since its exact effects stem from the unique personality of the victim, it's best to tailor your descriptions to the character at hand (especially if that character is a hero). Use the descriptions below for inspiration, but also create new Twists.

A final note: Every Carny Trouper has a "stage name," so the examples below are dubbed accordingly. You may have to change a name to suit the Twisted character's actual sex. (The Twisting has yet to create a transsexual.)

TABLE 1: Possible Twisting Effects

d10	(d20) Effect
1	Aggressive, always battle-ready
	(1) The Wild-Man!
	(2) The Living Blade!
2	Timid, retreating
	(3) The Human Knot!
	(4) The Incredible Melting Maiden!
3	Scheming
	(5) The Human Cobweb!
	(6) Madame Elastic!
4	Dishonest, deceitful
	(7) The Come-and-Go!
	(8) The Unreal!
5	Dense, oblivious
	(9) The Pinhead!
	(10) The (Beast name)-faced Boy!
6	Covetous, greedy
	(11) The Walking Ooze!
	(12) Countess Quicksand!
7	Cruel*
	(13) The World's Smallest Woman!
	(14) The Wasp-Man!
8	Passionate, led by emotions
	(15) The Horrific Headless Woman!
	(16) The Great Lord Pan!
9	Unflappable
	(17) The Lobster Girl!
	(18) Jack Frost!
10	Dull, "average"
	(19) The Sum-of-His-Parts!
	(20) The Wooden Boy!

* In small, petty ways. Characters who are truly cruel will be Twisted far more severely than the examples below.

TABLE RESULTS

Whether you roll randomly or simply use these results for inspiration, here's a gallery of potential new Troupers:

1. Once so wary he was a like a rabid guard dog, the *Wild-Man* has a face and body covered in long, thick hair. His teeth have Twisted into thick fangs, which cause 1d6 points of damage with each bite.

2. Before the Twisting, the *Living Blade* was so focused on self-defense that she spent every resource (and proficiency slot) to become a weapons expert, hoping to make her favorite weapon an extension of her body. And now it is; her weapon hand has merged with her dagger. Sadly, having a weapon growing from one's wrist makes the limb useful for little other than combat. . . .

3. The *Human Knot* was once willing to do anything to save himself from danger. Now he finds himself literally spineless; his bones soften when he's terrified. The Twist makes him unusually limber, granting him a +1 Dexterity bonus, and his contortions allow him to escape from bonds as easily as a character possessing the Rope Use proficiency. Sadly, a pliable skeleton does little to protect against injury; the Human Knot suffers an extra point of damage per die from blunt attacks.

4. Fear makes the body of the *Incredible Melting Maiden* dissolve into a fluid, coherent slime. In this state, she can ooze through the tiniest of cracks. The change does not affect her mind or senses, but she cannot speak or make any physical attacks while in liquid form. Fortunately, the Maiden can resolidify at will, but the change is mildly taxing: The Maiden can only assume her normal form for a number of hours each day equal to her Constitution. When the Maiden melts, her equipment does not transform with her and must be left behind.

5. The Twisting could scarcely ignore those who spend their days weaving intricate little plots. The *Human Cobweb* knows this all too well; a countless swarm of violet spiders skitters across his body, cloaking him in a gauzy web. If the Human Cobweb tries to rid himself of his horrid guests, he'll quickly discover that each time he kills a single spider personally, he suffers 1 point of damage. And each time someone inflicts a point of damage upon him—whether striking at him or his hardy spiders—at least one spider dies and sloughs off. As the Cobweb regains hit points, the spiders mysteriously appear in the vicinity and climb aboard his body, clinging tightly even in water. There is an "up side"; the Cobweb can send his arachnid allies out into the world as his personal spies. As long as a single unbroken thread of webbing links the Cobweb and each of his spies, he can see through the spiders' eyes.

6. Some scheming characters cloak themselves in a shroud of secrecy. *Madame Elastic* once kept her true self hidden from even her closest allies. Now, thanks to the Twist, her skin becomes so rubbery she can dramatically alter her features (effects resemble the 1st-level wizard spell *change self*). Madame Elastic can even mimic the features of specific individuals if she makes a successful Charisma check. Sadly, the effort of holding her features in place is taxing; after a number of minutes equal to her Constitution, her elastic skin sags into ill-defined folds resembling a wet leather sack. Before she can mold another face, Madame Elastic must rest in this featureless state for a number of rounds equal to the amount of time she spent holding her previous face.

7. The *Come-and-Go* used to be two-faced in the traditional sense. Now there's a second face on the back of his head. While this face has no mind of its own, it does twitch a bit. And the Trouper can see out of his second pair of eyes, gaining almost a 360-degree range of vision, which makes it all but impossible to catch him unawares. He can cover up the face to pass as normal, but it doesn't always work: whenever the Come-and-Go knowingly tells a lie, his second face cackles madly.

8. The *Unreal* was a woman known for being a bad liar. Now she's literally transparent; in bright light, one can see bones, veins, and organs floating beneath her clear skin and cloudy flesh. Grotesque as this transformation is, it does grant the character a 20% chance to Hide in Shadows, as thieves do. (If a character already has this ability and undergoes this Twisting, he or she gains a 20% bonus to Hide in Shadows rolls.)

9. Some characters, no matter what their actual Intelligence, never pay quite enough attention to their surroundings. They don't seem to use their entire brains. The Twisting has created *The Pinhead* by eliminating underused gray matter; his head is now a mere third of its original size. In this state, he can no longer wear standard (or even magical) headgear, but quite frequently, the cranial contraction actually sharpens his abilities, allowing him to adroitly focus his narrow little mind on a given task. The upshot: Once per game session, the Pinhead can automatically succeed at an Intelligence check or at the use of an Intelligence-based proficiency.

10. The *Ass-faced Boy* was once as stubborn as a jack-ass. Now he has a head to match. (A more bullish character might become the Bull-faced Boy instead, etc.) The Twisted character enjoys a 50% resistance to all mind-controlling spells but, having the head of a dumb animal, he has lost the ability to speak.

11. The *Walking Ooze* once had such "sticky fingers" that she couldn't resist a chance to loot or pillage. Thanks to the Twisting, she now secretes a thick, viscous layer of slime that coats her entire body. This adhesive scum allows the Walking Ooze to *spider climb* at will, but it tends to quickly ruin clothes and collect countless bits of trash that one might prefer not to be "stuck with."

12. Not all greedy characters steal; some are misers like *Countess Quicksand*. Now she can really hold on to her treasures. Any small item she wears, or which merely touches her skin, painlessly sinks into her flesh (e.g, gems, coins, even pebbles). Her skin seals over the item, creating a discolored bulge just beneath the surface. This thwarts most thieves, but removing any object causes 1d4 points of damage, as the item must be cut free.

13. The *World's Smallest Woman* was never a generous person. The Twisting changed her size to match her nature. Heroes who succumb to a similar fate will stand a mere 12+1d12 inches tall. For each foot of height they lose, they also lose a Strength point. Fortunately, for each foot lost they also gain a –1 Armor Class bonus.

14. The *Wasp-Man* used to enjoy spouting verbal barbs and petty cruelties. Now he has dark, barbed hooks sprouting from his tongue and his fingertips. He can attack with these barbs, causing 1d4 points of damage. A thief who gains a similar Twisting also gains a +10% bonus to his or her Climb Walls ability. Sadly, the same barbs also inflict a –10% penalty on any Pick Pockets attempts.

15. The *Horrific Headless Woman* once thought only with her heart, never her head. The Twisting made her "useless" head start to sink. Eventually, it emerged from her chest, leaving only a small stump where her neck once rose. Disturbing as her appearance may be, the Headless Woman has gained the ability to cast the 4th-level wizard spell *emotion* once per day. This ability can only affect a single target, and the Trouper also undergoes the effects of one of the spell's emotions, rolling 1d8 to determine just which passion seizes her heart.

16. Like many a lusty sailor, the *Great Lord Pan* once spent his life skipping from one romantic dalliance to the next. Now, he truly fits his reputation. The Twisting has granted the "Pan Man" the ability to cast the 1st-level wizard spell *friends* three times per day. Only members of the opposite sex react to his Charisma. Others may have a decidedly different reaction, since Pan also gains curling horns, hairy legs, and cloven hooves.

17. The *Lobster Girl* was once famous for being "thick-skinned"; she still is. Like a crustacean or insect, she boasts a thick, chitinous shell. It offers a natural 6 Armor Class, but imposes a –1 penalty to Dexterity.

18. *Jack Frost* used to turn a cold shoulder toward anyone who reached out to him. Now he has the special abilities and penalties of a Cold One (see *Champions of the Mists*). Moreover, his breath is always misty, no matter the temperature, and a thin layer of ice continually accumulates on his hair and frigid skin.

19. If a hero seems incredibly "mundane"—little more than a collection of scores and abilities—the Twisting might make him literally the *Sum-of-His-Parts*. The Trouper's body parts all become detachable. He can control his limbs even when they're separate from his body, mentally commanding them to move at a rate of 1 foot per round. They usually slither and flop like inchworms. Any damage against detached limbs is subtracted from the character's total hit points; his life-force connects him to his parts, and vice versa. Naturally, there's a drawback: Thanks to the Twisting, the limbs can *never* be firmly anchored. Whenever the character fails a Strength check, stressed limbs pop out of their sockets.

20. The amazing *Wooden Boy* has always had a rather wooden personality. Now he has leaves in place of hair; his skin resembles bark; and on any day he is exposed to sunlight, he doesn't have to eat. He can be affected by any spells targeted at plants. If the Wooden Boy remains in one spot for long enough, he may even take root.

Recovering from the Twisting

The Twisting does not necessarily last forever; once a character leaves the Carnival, it slowly fades. The operative word is *slowly*. To revert to normal, the Twisted character must stay away from the Carnival for *one full month* for each *day* spent with Isolde's group.

In essence, the Twisting begins the moment a character walks into the Carnival camp. The effects simply don't become visible for 6 days or so (5+1d8; see above). By the time a character notices the change, he or she will have to spend at least six months away from the Carnival to recover. The time adds up surprisingly quickly. A character who spends a full month with the Carnival will not recover for almost three years. Those who spend a year or more might as well just stay; they probably won't recover during their lifetimes. For this reason, most Troupers consider the Twisting permanent.

Keep careful track of how many days each hero spends with the Carnival—and how long they stay away. Knowing that the Twisting becomes evident on day 6 or later, a scheming hero might travel with the Carnival for five days, leave for a short time, and then return, expecting to arrive "fresh." The tactic doesn't work. Assuming they stay away for an entire month, only one day is erased from their exposure, and the clock is reset to four days, not zero.

The Twisting also can be also removed by a succession of *restoration* spells—provided one spell is cast for every week the Twisted character has spent with the Carnival. No Trouper will reveal this cure, because as of yet, none of them has discovered it.

cry that the Twisting takes decent folk and turns them into monsters, but they aren't seeing the whole picture.

What the Twisting really does is show your secret self. It takes your essence, whoever you are at your very core, and manifests it in the flesh. Of course, for some, having their true selves revealed does turn them into monsters, but you don't have to worry about that, do you, George?

Whatever causes the Twisting—and inside out, no one can really say what that powerful force is—it has a bizarre love for the ironic. Any little flaw in your character finds physical expression in your body. It's hard to say just when the Twisting's effects will become noticeable, but you probably have a few days before it sets in. Then there's no telling what will happen! You might wake up one day to find yourself completely changed, or the Twisting might creep into you slowly, over a few weeks. Don't bother trying to predict just how the Twisting will warp you, either; it never manifests the same way twice.

TINDAL ON ISOLDE

So, you're still wondering who Isolde really is. She has never come right out and confessed, and none of us risk asking. One should never pry into the private affairs of a lady, I like to say. Still, a man can't help but wonder.

Without a doubt, she's our guardian angel, but don't make a fool of yourself by taking this notion too literally. The Skurra may hold precisely that opinion, but I don't buy into it. They're just picking at the same crumbs as all the rest of us and making their best guess.

As a human possessing magical power, I like to frame Isolde along similar lines. Don't get me wrong. She's not just some mercenary with an enchanted sword—she's much more than that! But I'd wager my last two coppers she's flesh and blood, just like us. Well, just like me, at any rate. I don't know you too well.

I will concede this: The story I want to be true, even if I can't entirely surrender to it, is the version Hermos tells his friends. Apparently, not long after Isolde first joined the Carnival, Hermos walked right up to her and directly asked why she'd come to protect the Troupers. Her response was quite fascinating: She said she hadn't simply "come." She'd been "willingly sent." Never again has she been as candid or as talkative as she was that day.

Hermos has always been fond of spouting little spiritual lessons, and he has spun Isolde's simple statement into quite the poignant fable, bless his ox-sized heart. According to the original Troupers of the Carnival l' Morai, Hermos once had a friend named Marie. She was also part of the Puppet Show. In fact, it was she who told Hermos to lead the other Troupers to freedom, and then she stayed behind, surrendering her life to keep the Puppetmaster from pursuing the fugitives.

Hermos told me, as he tells everyone eventually, that he believes his old friend Marie sent Isolde. After Marie died, he claims, she found Isolde in the land of the dead and sent her back to watch over Hermos and his friends. So now we have Isolde as a ghostly guardian sent by the dearly departed. Gets you right here, doesn't it?

Of course, I know there's more to Isolde then playing shepherd to our flock. I've already mentioned the bit about how we travel—following a random yet highly fortuitous path—and how at any moment Isolde might tell everyone it's time to pull stakes and move on. Sometimes when she gives that order, it feels as if she's avoiding something, as if the Carnival is on the run. But I've also seen the glint of a predator in her eyes, and sometimes when Isolde declares it's time to go, I think she's on the hunt. But hunting who? And why? Maybe whoever it is that keeps posting those flyers; beyond that, I don't dare to guess.

Forgive my amusement over Hermos's fable, but I'm confident that, no matter why Isolde was "willingly sent" here, it wasn't just to protect a bunch of freaks. Nonetheless, she does seem to find that task as worthy as whatever she's *really* here to do, and we bless her for it!

Some of Pacali's crew seem to blame Isolde for Twisting. I don't quite agree with their thinking, but it is strange that she herself isn't affected. At least, if she *is* affected in some way, nobody can guess what it is. Once you see her, you'll know what I mean, she's that beautiful. But if the Twisting affects everything, even animals, even flowers, why would it leave Isolde untouched?

It's a question we Troupers ask each other all the time. Most of us agree that the Twisting manifests one's inner flaws and foibles physically, so more than a few Troupers believe that Isolde simply has no inner flaws! They believe her heart is so pure that the Twisting can't get its hooks into her; she offers it no failings to warp.

Some of the others think Isolde herself is actually the source of the Twisting. As they put it, this is her form of justice. You might think that the Twisting is a horror, that it turns men into monsters; most of us don't see it that way. Men are already the very worst kind of monsters, George. Out there, in your world, true evils lurk in innocent guises, hiding their blackened and venomous hearts behind pretty faces and pleasing smiles. Here in the Carnival, Isolde has made everyone equal, and made everyone honest. If you have evil in your heart, it will show in your face. Be a monster on the inside, be made a monster on the outside.

Hrmm? That's right, Hermos's ghost story is another explanation. We've never tested it, but it does seem likely that Isolde would be immune to the Twisting if she were a spirit, and thus had no flesh to twist. The same theory goes for the Skurra, if you believe it.

What do I think? That's clever, George. You're right, I don't believe any of those stories. My best guess? I'd wager that Isolde has been affected by the Twisting, but she's hidden it somehow. Honestly, have you ever seen anyone as perfect as she? Perhaps, just perhaps, the Isolde everyone knows so well isn't the real her—just some powerful illusion . . .

As the sun sank behind the jagged peaks, Tindal tipped his hat at an approaching woman. The Outsider looked over his shoulder and saw a stunning dark-haired beauty striding purposefully past them. The woman wore black trousers and high black boots, and she exuded power and grace.

So this is Isolde, the Mistress of the Carnival, the Outsider thought.

She was leading a teenage girl with snowy hair and skin like bleached parchment. Stopping abruptly, she waved the giant Hermos to her side.

"Pull stakes," Isolde commanded firmly. "Now."

Without a moment's hesitation, Hermos clapped his large hands, and in an instant, the entire area was buzzing with activity, as the denizens of the Carnival packed up their camp with startling speed.

Tindal tapped the Outsider's shoulder with his cane. "We must find you some transportation," he said quickly. He pointed toward a violet vardo. "There. Go to Madame Fortuna's wagon. And do it now. . . ."

Secrets of the Skurra

CHAPTER TWO

No Mask like open truth to cover lies,
As to go naked is the best disguise.

—William Congreve
The Double Dealer

MADAME FORTUNA AT YOUR SERVICE

Greetings, giorgio. Sit here, before me. There is no time to find somewhere else to stay. The Carnival must move on, and if you leave this vardo you surely will be left behind. Even now, the Mists arise to hide our passing; do you not see them licking at the windowpane?

Of course I know why you have come to me. I am called Madame Fortuna, am I not? I am Vistani, am I not? It is not the giorgios' truth that we gypsies all tell fortunes? Pah. Do not embarrass us both with your feeble attempts to understand my people. Just sit, and listen. You may remain here with me while we travel through the Mists. You can feel the vardo's motion already, can you not?

I suppose you would like me to pass the time by reading your palm or telling you the secrets of your fate. Pah. Do not fool yourself. Indeed, I can see beyond sight, but such power is wasted on your kind. You giorgios are so easily fooled; it is your face I read, as much as your fortune. I tell those who come to me what they want to hear, or what they need to hear if I deem them worthy. But the *whole* truth is wasted on giorgios.

The deck of cards before me? Simple tricks and props to fool your credulous eyes. Puckery, the Troupers call it. Yes, I do possess a true tarokka deck, but its powers are draining, and I'll not waste them on frivolous questions.

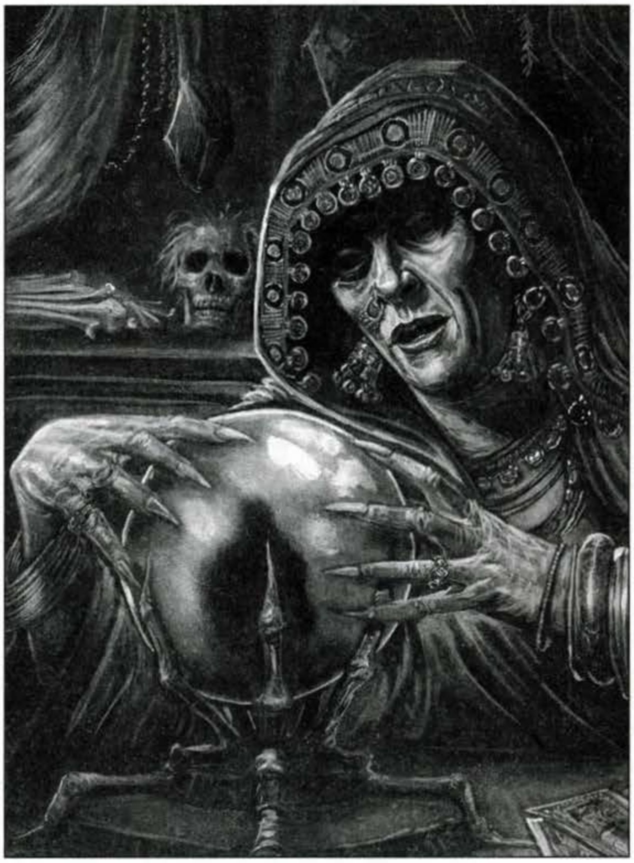
So no, I will not read your fortune. But I sense such is not your true desire. You do not wish to learn about the future, for your eyes are filled with the glint of other questions. You are seeking knowledge of your present, and of the Carnival's past. You wish to know about the Twisting, and about Isolde. And you wish to know more about the Skurra—why their faces, unlike my own, are painted white, and why their lips never utter a sound.

But all these questions pale before the mystery of *me*. You wish to know how I read palms, and how I can meet your gaze when all I have for eyes are fathomless pits that admit no light. *Pah*. Do not fear offending me, giorgio; you are not capable of it. I will tell you all the truths you need to know. Or only those you wish to hear, if you prefer it.

Even without eyes, I can see all that I need to see. When I came to the Carnival, I was not as I appear now. My eyes glittered like violet gems, and I wore the skurra-vera, the mask of paint that protects my kin against the Twisting. But it also separates them. The Vistani are not truly accepted by your so-called Troupers, as they call themselves. In their hearts of hearts, the Carnival's folk are still just giorgios. Like all of your kind, they neither understand nor embrace my people.

It became plain that one of us would have to forgo our protective enchantments. One of us would have to suffer the effects of the Twisting so that we could have a voice that all could hear. I was chosen to be that voice, and the Twisting claimed my eyes, yet it granted me the ability to see what others cannot. Now I am the voice of the Skurra. The Troupers have accepted me, and they gave me the name I offer to you now. Yet I am alone, no longer truly Skurra, and yet not one with the Troupers. I am simply Madame Fortuna, teller of fortunes, truth-speaker for my people, and a Mongrel, like you.

No, child, I will not tell you my true name. That is a truth you do not need to know.



Madame Fortuna

Madam Fortuna is a member of the Vistani, a gypsy-like people living throughout Ravenloft. (Fortuna's kin, the Carnival's Skurra, represent a very small, unusual group.)

Vistani women have a "second sight." They are also reputed to have the ability to open gates that will allow their caravans to travel from world to world. Within Ravenloft, the Vistani are reputed to be the only people who can predict where the Mists will take them once they enter them. (For details, see the RAVENLOFT accessory *Van Richten's Guide to the Vistani*, or the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual, Volume Two.)*

Before Madame Fortuna came to the Carnival, she was a member of the Corvara tribe of the Boem tasque. Her "sight beyond sight" allows her to see the life-force of all living beings in the form of glowing auras. She can see living creatures in the dark in a manner akin to infravision. Moreover, she can sense the law-chaos aspect of any character's alignment at a glance, and is rumored to be able to read emotions and sense lies. It may be possible for her to see some forms of magic as well; she has hinted in the past that she can see the pearly sword Isolde carries. However, Madame Fortuna is completely blind to nonliving items and creatures, including the undead and magical constructs such as Mister ?.

When interacting with Georges, Madame Fortuna is often cryptic and deceptive.

Madame Fortune, human female, 9th-level thief: AC 10; MV 12; hp 36; THAC0 16; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA backstab ×4 damage; SW see below; SZ M; ML average (10); Str 10, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 12; AL CN.

Thief Abilities: PP 20, OL 85, F/RT 20, MS 90, HS 70, DN 95, CW 80, RL 0.

Let us turn to your other concerns. Do you see the deck of cards on the table before me? Cut the deck and tell me the card you pick. Do not fear the cards' magic. I have already told you this deck holds no power. It is a simple tool used to guide the questions of those who seek my fortunes, and that is how I shall use it now. There are many truths, giorgio. These cards shall decide which truths will be revealed to you; I leave you to decide which truths to you will embrace.

Now, pick your card.

Ah, the Charlatan. Those who hide behind masks, and disguise their true motives. Those who live behind . . .

Painted Grins

The cards have chosen well, for now I shall tell you of my kin, the Skurra. You wish to know why the Vistani of the Carnival wear such horrid face-paints? Why do the Skurra not speak? These shall be the first truths I reveal.

Perhaps our painted faces remind you of some giorgio harlequin? Pah. What you see as clown paint, we call the *skurra-vera*. We understand its power, and you do not. The skurra-vera is what your giorgio sages call "sympathetic" magic—an artless term for an ancient power. We hide behind those leering faces to make ourselves into monsters so that the Twisting will not. This is why I alone have been stricken with the Twisting, while my kin remain whole.

But the skurra-vera's power demands much. It is not enough to simply wear the paints; one must bury one's life completely behind the mask. It is no coincidence that those who wear the skurra-vera derive their name from the mask; the Skurra must become one with the mask to survive. The wearer must never speak and must never reveal her true name. To proclaim her own identity while wearing the skurra-verra is to shatter its magic. If the wearer of the mask reveals her true self in any way, the Twisting will claim the poor fool immediately, and the skurra-verra will never protect her again.

The Skurra must live behind their masks every moment they remain with the Carnival. But once a month, on the night after the full moon, the Skurra leave the Carnival. We call this time the lunaset. Its secrets are not for your ears, but I can tell you this much: During this night, we gather the clays and oils we need, and we weave the enchantments that transform these simple pigments into our great and powerful guardians. No Trouper has ever seen a Skurra apply her face-paints, and none ever shall. During the rest of the month, the mask must never be removed! You will see this for yourself, in time. In the days after each lunaset, the Skurra paints look fresh and wet, but by the end of each month the Skurras' faces are dingy and laced with fine cracks. One can only hold a false smile so long before it shatters.

If you doubt the power of the skurra-vera, you need only stare into our faces. Watch the Twisting seep into the distorted, leering masks, desperate to find purchase in our hearts. Those who stare too long into a Skurra's face have been known to faint, victims of the horrors they found swimming in our smiles! But blink, and the effect will vanish, and you will see nothing but a harmless grin.

No, giorgio, you cannot use the skurra-vera to protect yourself from the Twisting. It was created with Vistani blood, for Vistani blood; it has no power to hide one such as yourself from the Twisting's touch.

I know what you are thinking now. Tindal has filled your head with nonsense, telling you that the Skurra are the ghosts of Vistani who failed their tribes in life. Telling you that Isolde brought the Skurra back from the land of death to protect the Carnival in its travels. No doubt some Trouper will also tell you that the Skurra conceal themselves behind false faces to hide from Death, and not from the Twisting. Ignore their giorgio nonsense. Their truth is not my truth. My truth is the one you should trust.

Skurra-vera: Magic Masks

The Skurra face-paint protects anyone of Vistani blood from the effects of the Twisting. Half-Vistani heroes who travel with the Carnival will be offered the secrets of the skurra-vera's creation, and the opportunity to wear it if they wish, although they must abide by all the restrictions noted by Madame Fortuna. Most importantly, they must never speak, and they must never reveal or even answer to their true names.

The longer one stares at a Skurra's mask, the more hideously distorted it becomes, a visible effect of the Twisting's relentless attempt to break through its protection. If heroes look too long into the abyss of a Skurra's painted leer, they may be overwhelmed by the horrors of what they see looking back. Thus, any character who stares at a Skurra's face for a number of seconds equal to his or her Wisdom score must make an immediate horror check.

Although the term *skurra-vera* is derived in part from the patterna word for *clown,* the Vistani do not think of themselves as clowns. They turn a cold eye toward anyone foolish enough to refer to them as such.

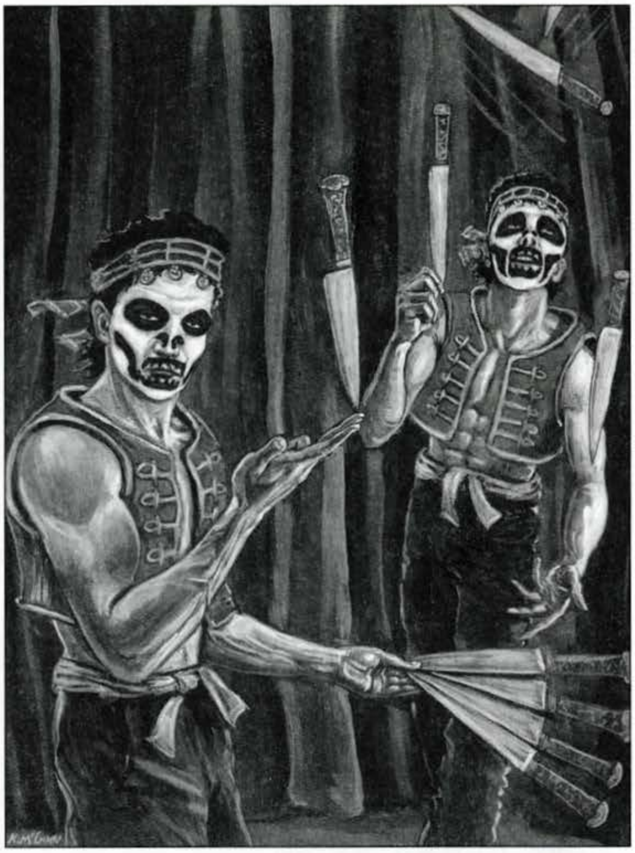
Perhaps you would be comforted to know that the Skurra do not simply haunt the Carnival, mutely watching your every move. I assure you, that is not all they do. My kin do speak, in their fashion. The magic of the mask does not allow them to talk as I am speaking now, but they do have . . .

Hidden Voices

The Skurra have learned ways to communicate without words, secret ways unknown to the giorgios. First, they speak through movement. When a Skurra dances, she speaks volumes with every step. If you see two Skurra aping some giorgio visitor to our camp, know that in their buffoonery, they are discussing that giorgio in great detail.

Skurra music also conveys a message. My people roam about the Carnival, filling the air with the sound of their flutes and violins, and every note, every phrase, has something to say. In your tour, did you notice that the music always seemed to match your mood? To travel with you? Did you feel in your heart that the music was just for you? Pah. The music spoke, but not to you. It was filled with whispers not meant for your ears.

If some giorgio makes trouble at one end of the Carnival, he may flee, thinking he can outrun any who would chase him. How sad for him when he finds himself suddenly cut off at the far edge of the camp by a Skurra who lies in waiting. Here is a truth for you, giorgio. A man may outrun his quickest pursuer, but no man ever born can run faster than the notes played on a Vistani violin!



Skurra Music & Language

The Skurra have developed a secret language, slipping hidden messages into innocuous gestures, into dance movements, and especially into their music. Skurra continually use their melodies to send messages across the Carnival. Scoundrels visiting the campsite inevitably discover that news of any transgression can be instantly broadcast to every Skurra within earshot.

Half-Vistani heroes who don the magical face-paint also have the chance to gain a basic grasp of the Skurra's musical language. The character must allocate a nonweapon proficiency slot to the task. Only characters with Vistani blood may learn these musical secrets.

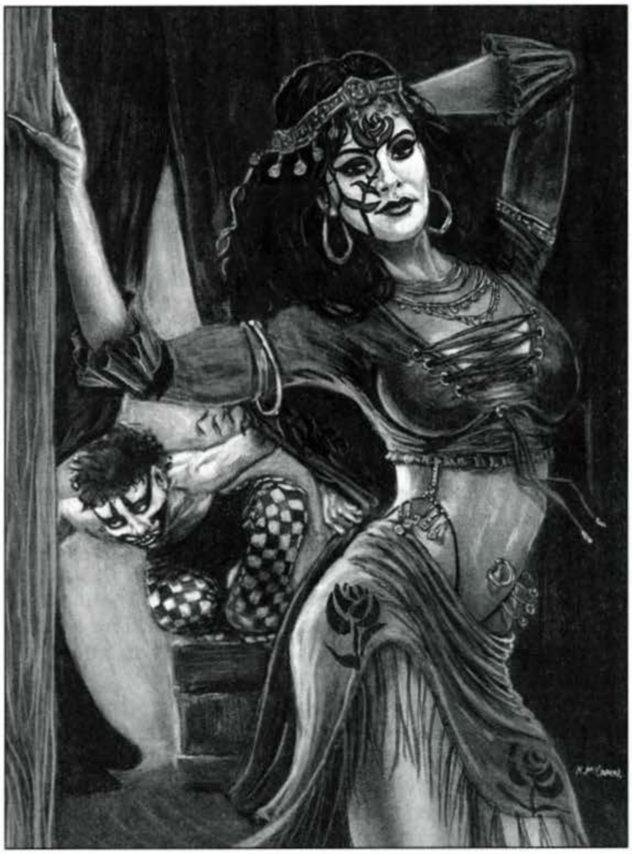
Turn the next card, giorgio. Ah, the Priest. One who gives her life to the service of forces greater than herself. Again, the cards choose well. They tell me I must rid you of the childish rumors the Troupers spread so freely. I must reveal to you more of the people lurking behind the painted masks, tell you of the fiery heart that beats within each one, that still beats within me. I shall tell you of . . .

The Tribe of None

The Troupers call us Skurra, and they speak the truth. They call us Vistani, and they also speak the truth, and yet they do not. I shall try to explain.

Vistani blood flows through the veins of the Skurra, but they are mortu, as am I. Some Skurra have lost their tribes, others were cast out. In this way, we are no longer truly Vistani. For our kind, to be mortu is to exist in a cold half-life, cut off from all that fuels our passions. The Troupers do not understand our ways. They have learned that mortu can mean "undead" in your tongue. This confuses them, and the constraints of the Skurra mask have led them to see us as ghosts. Are we simply mortu, or are we undead? Pah. The difference is in the truth you choose to believe.

Hah! I know what you are thinking. Darklings? *Ptui!* I spit at that word! How dare you accuse us of being among their accursed number! No Skurra has ever given herself over to the darkness! No Skurra would ever accept one who is damned to the shalach-ti! Do we not travel the Mists? No darkling can achieve this, so you must speak of the darklings no more.



In the end, this is all you need to know: The Skurra have much in common with the Troupers. We come to the Carnival because we have nowhere else to go, having been cast out for who we are, not what we have done. Here we travel together under the banner of Isolde. We form our own tribe, and thus do not lose the gifts of Vistani blood. Yet the mask makes each of us feel alone. And so we have become the Tribe of None—the Skurra, the living ghosts.

Living Ghosts?

Are the Skurra merely outcast Vistani or literally "living ghosts"? Madam Fortuna's rare attempts to clarify the matter typically end up muddying the waters. The true nature of the Carnival's Vistani is left for you to decide.

If the Skurra are simply living Vistani, most come from the Boem tasque, the Naiat tribe in particular. However, nearly all the Vistani tasques are represented by one or two Skurra. Only the Manusa tasque is absent. Most Skurra belong to the thief class, though many are fighters, and all are typically between levels 3 and 9. Despite their status as mortu, the Skurra retain the abilities of their tasques. Most Skurra also possess proficiencies relating to carnival entertainment, such as tumbling, gaming, and the ability to play one or more musical instruments.

If the Skurra are in fact restless Vistani spirits called up by Isolde to protect the Carnival, consider them corporeal, preserved ghosts of 1st or 2nd magnitude, using the classification system found in *Van Richten's Guide to Ghosts* (reprinted in *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Volume Two*). Should they lose the protective magic of their face-paint, the ghosts will not face the Twisting: They will be unable to hide from Death. The following sunset, such a defenseless Skurra will be attacked by a grim reaper who comes to drag the spirit back to the land of the dead. (The *Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium Appendix I & II* details the grim reaper; if you lack that resource, substitute a minor death, as described in the *Dungeon Master® Guide.*)

Of course, it is quite possible that the Skurra's ranks are made up of *both* mortu and the undead, and that they do not distinguish between the two.

THE ENTERTAINERS

What do the Skurra do for the Carnival? Pah! What do they not do? It is the Skurra who drive the vardos, guiding the Carnival through the Mists. It is the Skurra who keep a silent eye on the Georges, making sure that no one snakes into the camp without paying. We also make sure they keep a respectful distance from the Troupers on stage. And we sell trinkets, we run games as the Troupers do, we tend to the animals. And yes, we even perform, as is our nature. Perhaps you watched as we capered to the delight of giorgio children and to the horror of their parents?

Did you not see the Skurra while you were shown around the ring? We hide our true selves behind our masks of paint, but not even the Skurra can completely smother the passion that flows into our performances. To know a Skurra is to know the style of her dance. At least, that is as much as you will ever know of her. Perhaps I should tell you of several of our number, so that when next you see them, you will know what you face. You will know that the Skurra are not just leering ghosts. They may not speak, but that does not mean they do not feel, that there is no fire burning in their blood.

Tell me, giorgio, have you witnessed the twirling knives of . . .

The Blade Brothers

The Troupers gave the brothers their title, and it is the only name to which they will answer. They are twins, one indistinguishable from the other. Even the pattern of their Skurra is identical to the last detail.

It is said that the brothers were born under a bad star, and cast out by their tribe before they came of age, lest they bring doom to the others. I will tell you no more of their past, for it matters little now. The brothers are here; they are Skurra. That is all you need to know.

Here they are master jugglers, walking whirlwinds of razor-edged steel. Their precision is preternatural, and it can be terrifying to those who earn their wrath. But they are simply entertainers, and they hold no malice. If you offend, they will not harm you. No, never. They will simply stand to either side of you, flinging their knives to each other, letting them pass a whisper's breadth from your precious skin. It can be quite amusing for the rest of us. Stand very still, and the brothers may transform your pretty clothes into colorful tatters upon the ground, while all your exposed skin shows not even a scratch. No, the Blade Brothers would never harm anyone who offends them. Not accidentally, mind you.

The Blade Brothers

These twins were born to the Kamii tribe of the Kaldresh tasque, although their natural exuberance causes some to mistake them for Naiat. They have mastered metalcraft as well as juggling, and forge all their throwing knives themselves, refusing to use any others. Whether their throwing knives are created with Kamii enchantments, or whether their throwing skill is augmented by their own possibly supernatural nature, the Blade Brothers are expert knife throwers, and no blade made by their hand will ever harm an unintended target.

The brothers have identical game statistics. They appear playful or menacing, as it suits them.

The Blade Brothers, human males, F8: AC 6 (Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 56; THAC0 12 (8 with thrown daggers); #AT 2 (any weapon) or 4 (thrown daggers); Dmg 1d4+2 (specialization with daggers); SA 4 atttacks per round with thrown daggers; SZ M; ML champion (15); Str 12, Dex 18, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 11; AL CG.

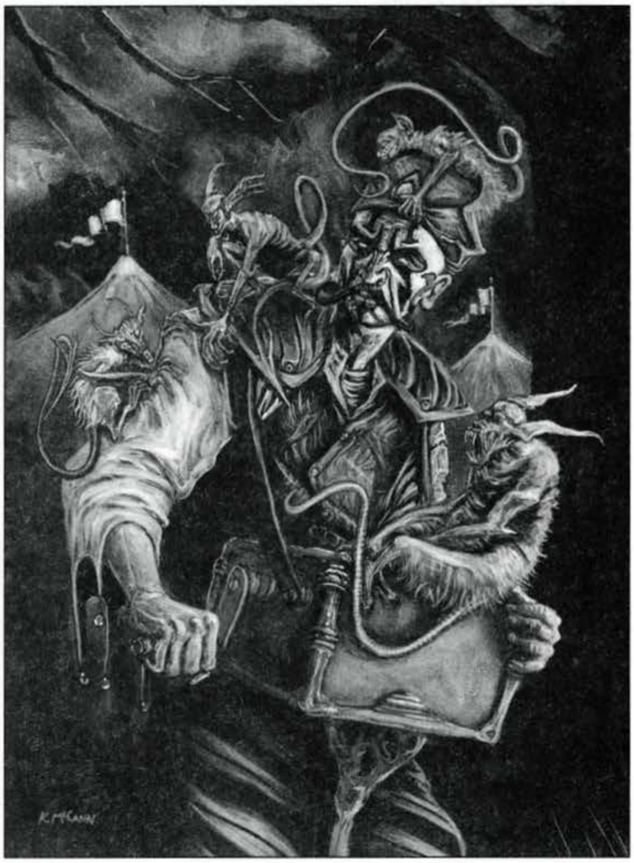
The Crimson Rose

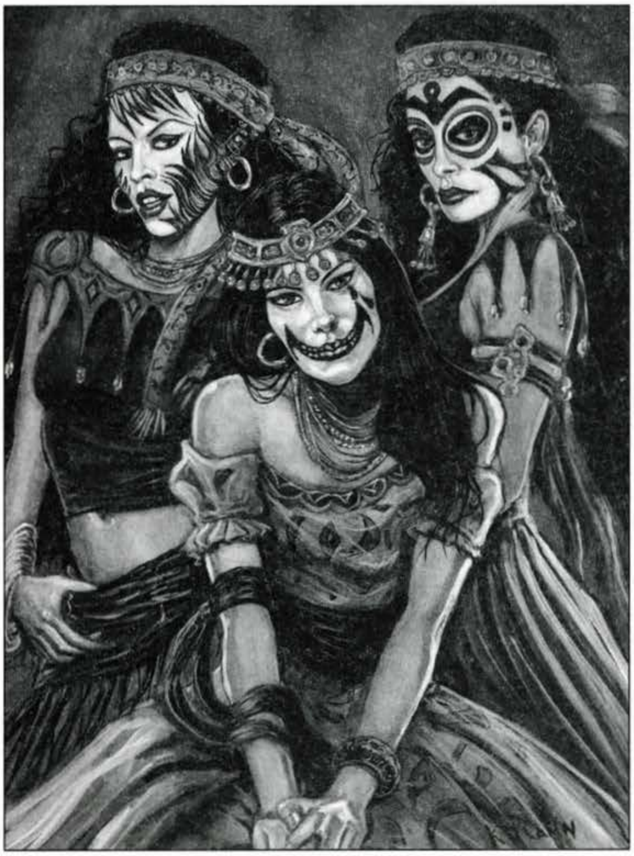
Have you seen her yet, giorgio? You would remember if you had. You will know her by the red rose painted on her smooth white face, and by her swirling dances. Be forewarned, giorgio. Her dances can entrance a man, can so inflame his passion that he thinks of nothing but her, becoming lost in her curves, in the lovely jade eyes smoldering behind the ashen mask. But do not fret. All delights are within reach at the Carnival, for the right price. But do not ask for too much, lest you discover what others can no longer tell you: the Rose may be beautiful, but she has many deadly thorns.

Why did the Crimson Rose come to the Carnival? I cannot say for sure, but perhaps it had to do with . . .

The Familiar

The Familiar is the smallest of the Skurra, and he is the son of the Crimson Rose. He came to the Carnival in the belly of his mother nine years ago, sired by some nameless giorgio father. The Skurra-vera was painted on the child's face on the day of his birth. In those nine years of life, he has never spoken a word, never uttered





a single noise. He is the one true child of the Carnival. He can be as hard to find as Isolde herself, but wherever one finds the Crimson Rose, her Familiar will not be far away.

Some believe that, behind the mask, the Familiar is a normal child—as normal as can be expected. The Troupers call him a "pony punk" because he helps with the animals, but "punk" is just their word for all children. I think they find it affectionate. There are others who claim the Twisting touched this child even *before* he was born, before he could be protected by the Skurra face-paint. After all, the Familiar has been known to appear or vanish in the blink of an eye. You look, you see him. Look away for an instant, and he is gone. Look again, and he is behind you. Does the Twisting lurk within the boy? I have gazed deep into his eyes, and I have seen the truth of his nature. What is that truth? Pah. It is not for you to know!

The Crimson Rose

The Rose is a young, bewitching beauty, in the literal sense. Formerly of the Naiat tribe, she can dominate the passions of any man who watches her seductive dance. In fact, if the Rose wishes, she can charm any male who watches her dance uninterrupted for a full turn, as if casting *charm person*, the 1st-level wizard spell.

The Rose can be a dangerous companion, however. Should a non-Vistani male make forceful sexual advances or other indecent proposals, the Rose must make a Wisdom check. If the check is successful, she remains a coy seductress but will rarely go any further than that. If the check is failed, she lures the man to a secluded spot and launches into a killing rage, attacking him with the small knife she conceals on her person. In this murderous state, she has a Strength of 18 (gaining a +1 attack bonus and a +2 bonus to damage). She also regenerates 1d4 hit points per round. The rage continues until she is killed or subdued, or until her unfortunate target is dead. After killing her victim, she falls unconscious.

The Skurra (and most Troupers) know about this character's violent episodes, so they covertly keep an eye on her, lest a George or Mongrel get "too friendly." If the Rose becomes violent with a hero, 1d4+1 Skurra swiftly come to his aid, using nets and clubs to subdue and carry off the raging Rose.

The Crimson Rose, human female, 3rd-level thief: AC 7 (Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 16; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3 (knife); SA backstab ×2 damage, killing rage; SD *charm person*, regeneration; SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 14, Dex 17, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 17; AL N.

Thief Abilities: PP 60, OL 30, F/RT 20, MS 25, HS 35, DN 35, CW 75, RL 20.

The Familiar

The truth of the Familiar's "disappearing act" is up to you. He might simply have a child's natural ability to go unnoticed, coupled with a little talent and practice. Troupers frequently say it's something more, though—a Twisting effect akin to *blink* (the 3rd-level wizard spell).

Crimson Rose and other Skurra are teaching the boy roguish arts. He has already started to become proficient in some areas.

The Familiar, human male, 0-level: AC 9 (Dex bonus); MV 12; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d2 (kick or bite); SA backstab ×2 damage; SD *blink* ability; SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 9, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 15, Wis 9, Cha 17; AL N.

Thief Abilities: PP 10, MS 15, HS 10, DN 5.

The Organ Grinder

Perhaps while you wandered about the ring, you fancied that you were being watched. Did you see dark shapes peering at you from between the spokes of a vardo's wheel? Did you not spot tiny creatures shuffling about in the shadows of the camp? Have no fear, giorgio, you are not losing your mind. Those creatures were there, and they did stare at you with inquisitive eyes.

The Twisting does not simply change people, you know. It warps all living things that remain within our camp long enough. It would even twist the grass beneath one's feet if not for our endless travels. The

The Organ Grinder

The Organ Grinder once belonged to the Equaar tribe of the Kaldresh tasque. He has little tolerance for other people, retreating into himself whenever addressed. However, he has always enjoyed an effortless, preternatural rapport with animals, and no natural or Twisted animal will ever willingly harm him. In fact, the Organ Grinder is one of only two Carnival members that the Hideous Man-Beast will not attack in bestial form. (Silessa, the Snake Mistress, is the other.)

When the Organ Grinder turns the crank on his ornate music box, its peculiar tune can summon a swarm of creeplings, which will appear at the rate of 1d6 per round over the next three rounds. Most of the time these creatures dance and frolic to the music, but if he must, the Organ Grinder can direct his little friends to obey specific, simple commands.

The Organ Grinder, human male, F2: AC 10; MV 12; hp 16; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA can control creeplings & fidgets; SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 16, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 10; AL NG.

Creeplings and Fidgets

No one is quite sure how many stray animals have lingered in the Carnival camp long enough to be Twisted; they are an untamed lot, usually seen out the corner of one's eye skittering behind a canvas banner, or strangely staring at passersby from the shadows beneath the vardos.

Most of these animals are stray cats and dogs, but the Twisting has altered them so much that their underlying nature is difficult to discern. Troupers have a wide variety of colorful names for the little beasties, none of which is used consistently. The most popular nicknames, "creeplings" and "fidgets," are interchangeable. A creature that can't walk well (or at all) might be dubbed a "crawler" instead. The nicknames help everyone distinguish this lot from the rest of the Mongrels (non-Troupers who travel with the Carnival).

Many Troupers consider the Creeplings a nuisance, since they generally behave like unusually cunning and devious raccoons. It's not uncommon for a pack of fidgets to slink up behind a George and suddenly pounce on him, relieving him of all his bright, shiny objects and ornate baubles (which they have a hard time resisting). Usually, the Organ Grinder returns the stolen goods.

These beings only attack when cornered, or if ordered into action by the Organ Grinder. They attack en masse, inflicting 1d13 points of damage each with sharp little teeth or claws.

Creeplings, Crawlers, & Fidgets (unknown total, 3d6 appear at any one time): AC 4; MV 12; HD ½; hp 1–4; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3; SA swarm; SD +4 on saving throws; SZ T (1′–2′ tall) ; ML unsteady (5–7); Int semi (2–4); AL N; XP 35.

Troupers call us Skurra, but they also call us Mongrels—and we are not the only strays drawn to the Carnival. Like moths to the flame, they come, those poor creatures unwanted by their masters. The tribes of other Vistani are followed by the vista-chiri, little songbirds. We are followed by stray cats and cur. Most are left behind when we move on, but some remain with us, and risk the Twisting even as you do.

The Organ Grinder tends to these poor creatures. You shall know this Skurra by the music-box he carries. There is a simpler form of Skurra paints that we apply to our animals to protect them from the Twisting, but we do not always catch them in time. Indeed, you may soon notice that not all our strangely painted horses have two eyes and four hooves. The Organ Grinder is the one who tends to all our animals, protecting them with the Skurra-vera. He treats these creatures as if they were his own children, and they seem to return his love.

But the strays are a problem, for unlike our own animals, they dart and hide at first, and the Organ Grinder cannot always catch them before the Twisting sets in. He holds a special fondness for these little creatures, oddities which the Troupers call creeplings and fidgets. In fact, they set the Organ Grinder apart even more than his music, for you almost never see him without the company of little misshapen creatures, capering and cavorting about him as he plays. They are his true friends, for the Organ Grinder is uncomfortable among men, and he shrinks even from his fellow Skurra. Naturally, you may find the creeplings hideous. Many Troupers consider them pests, with their grasping paws and greedy natures. But even the most insensitive Trouper would never cast out these creatures, for the little Mongrels are not so different from the rest of us. They too are unwanted, abnormal. So I give you a warning, giorgio: To harm the Organ Grinder's companions is to draw the wrath of all the Carnival upon yourself.

What was, what is, what has yet to be. This is what you face when you meet . . .

The Fates Three

You will always see these three Skurra together, for they are sisters in all ways but blood. Their face paint is quite distinctive. One wears a clever black design like a harlequin's mask, ringing her eyes with dark patches, each patch circled in red. Another adorns her ears and a bit of her jawline with winding red designs that resemble flames. And the third Fate marks her face with a hideous grin, adding two black tears upon one cheek.

The Fates Three work as one. They do not dance seductively, as the Crimson Rose does, however. They resemble jesters, wandering the Carnival to ape the behavior of our visitors, much to the amusement of the giorgios' own companions. If you must think of the Skurra as "clowns," these three would take the least offense. But mind you, do not offend them, lest you be subject to the darker edge of their talents. An idle threat? Think again. The Fates Three can see into the minds of those around them. You had better hope that they find nothing within your own mind worth their mockery.

Yes, the Fates Three simply exaggerate the motions of a visitor, but when they find ugliness hidden within, they will drag it out for all to know. I have seen many a giorgio watching the Troupers with a look of mild pity on his face, while inwardly that same man was mocking the "freaks" before him. Imagine his surprise when he turned to find the Fates Three silently laughing at him, as he had been laughing at the Troupers. And once, I saw a giorgio run screaming from the campground when the Fates Three started to pantomime the way he had secretly murdered his business partner the year before.

That is enough about my kin. What truths shall I reveal to you now? Perhaps you are ready to learn of the . . .

MYSTERIES OF THE CARNIVAL

Yes, I sense this is true. You have many questions about the Carnival itself. You wish to know how it is we can cross borders that are closed to you. How we defy the evil forces which plague this land. Perhaps you simply wish to know the truth about Isolde. If the cards deem it, I shall reveal all. Now, let us see your next card.

Ah, The Ghost. This card speaks of history, of the past. Very well. I shall tell you . . .

The Fates Three

The Fates Three—respectively called Leer, Pry, and Scream—came to the Carnival separately, and years apart. Leer and Pry simply wandered into camp, but Scream was rescued in the domain Invidia, snatched from the brutal thugs of Mallochio Aderre.

All three women are thought to belong to the Boem tasque, but not even the other Skurra can say for certain whether they are Corvara or Naiat. Their companions know almost nothing about their past. Individually, the Fates' prescient gifts represent normal Vistani talents. However, when they pool their resources as the Fates Three, they seem capable of drawing even the most deeply hidden thoughts from those who are near them.

In truth, the Fates Three are among the rarest of magic users—those who are virtually powerless while apart, yet wield great magic when united. And the Fates' powers are growing. As time goes by, they will discover new abilities and grow even more powerful. For now, the trio simply creates an effect like *ESP*, the 2nd-level wizard spell, with a few twists: The magic only works on a single, sentient target at time, and it only reveals thoughts that the target actively wishes to conceal (rather than surface thoughts). There is no limit to the ESP's duration, but it has a range of 5 yards. (Note: More details on this type of spellcaster are provided in *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium Volume III,* slated for release in the year 2000.)

Leer, human female, 2nd-level fighter: AC 9; MV 12; hp 15; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 12, Dex 15, Con 14, Int 14, Wis 12, Cha 14; AL NG.

Notes: Leer is impetuous and witty.

Pry, human female, 4th-level thief: AC 6; MV 12; hp 16; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA backstab ×2 damage; SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 11, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 10, Cha 17; AL NG.

Thief Abilities: PP 75 OL 40 F/RT 35 MS 70 HS 35 DN 45 CW 70 RL 10

Notes: Pry is sensuous and very observant.

Scream, human female, 1st-level thief: AC 10; MV 12; hp 5; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA backstab ×2 damage; SZ M; ML champion (16); Str 12, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 11, Cha 12; AL NG.

Thief Abilities: PP 30, OL 10, F/RT 5, MS 40, HS 30, DN 25, CW 60, RL 0.

Notes: Scream is demonstrative and bold.

How the Carnival Began

To know the history of the Skurra is to know the history of the Carnival itself. You have heard a bit of this tale before, I think. Then I shall not linger on the details. Just know this truth: The Carnival you journey with now was born in I'Morai, the one city it will never visit again.

You know that Hermos, the giant, led his people into the Mists, seeking freedom. Perhaps you also know that these Troupers found themselves in Darkon, the land now called Necropolis. They had hoped to find a new home, and to live among the giorgios. Pah. Yes, many came to see the performers. And yes, they dropped their coins in the hat, and they laughed at the Troupers' antics. It did the Troupers' hearts good to hear laughter. But that laughter faded as soon as Hermos asked whether he and his friends could stay in the giorgios' city.

Then Hermos and his friends were no longer called entertainers. Suddenly, they were "freaks" and "monsters" who had to be driven away from "normal, decent" men and women. Hermos and his friends had fled the torment of I'Morai only to find themselves despised and treated like dogs. But I choose my words badly, for dogs would have been treated much better.

And then the very land shook, and giorgio and Trouper alike thought that the end of the world had come. Angry clouds filled the skies, and when they cleared, the stars had changed. It was the Great Upheaval, and it struck terror into the hearts of Hermos and his band. They fled Darkon, hoping to escape the hatred and the tremors in a new land.

They chose their new home very poorly. After the Upheaval had ended, they fled into Falkovnia, and there they would have been enslaved or killed, had Isolde not rescued them and decided to remain as their patron. A new Carnival formed under the banner of she who offered her protection and accepted nothing in return. But this was still not the Carnival as it is today.

It was soon after Isolde arrived that the Twisting began, and not long after that came the first of my people—the first of the Vistani. Her name was Arabela, and she had abandoned her tribe. Perhaps she crossed paths with the Carnival by chance; perhaps it was fate. But in the instant Arabela first saw Isolde, she recognized Isolde's true power, and offered her allegiance. It was Arabela who created the Skurra paints to protect herself from the Twisting, and it was Arabela who first sought out other mortu, to bring them into the Tribe of None.

And then it was Arabela who died. Yes, giorgio, she who should be speaker for her people is instead ten years dead, struck down by an assassin who came to the Carnival asking to join as a Trouper. Why did he do this? I cannot say, but do not worry, giorgio. The assassin did not escape, and he was judged by the Law of the Carnival—by the Law of Isolde. Even though we Vistani shook our fists and tore at our clothes, demanding vengeance, Isolde herself delivered the punishment.

We could not have inflicted a more deserving fate upon him. That black-blooded villain is still here, you understand. He was the first of—*pah*. It is an ugly matter. I need not tell you of it, not when the Trouper called Pacali can simply show you. But know this truth: Killing Arabela did not kill the Skurra. One by one, more of my mortu kin arrived, and when there were enough to guide the wagons, the Carnival became as you see it today.

Now you have the knowledge you need to understand the true nature of Carnival, or at least to begin. It is time for you to learn why the Carnival is not merely a traveling collection of the unwanted. What is your next card? Ah, the Mists, of course. Then that is where I shall begin . . .

Traveling the Road of Mist

For many years now, the Carnival has traveled, wandering down a road which has no end. When we make camp, we stay only a day or two, and never more than a week, lest the Twisting begin to seep into the soil. Then Isolde declares it time to move on, and we Skurra lead the wagons into the Mists, as we have done this night. Isolde never directs our path, and we never set it; we simply follow the unseen currents. In our many years of travel the Carnival has visited all four corners of the world, and many lands thought lost in the Mists.

Isolde has vast power, but there are things in the night even she has cause to fear. When she senses one of these terrible dangers is near, she can order the

Mist Navigation

The Skurra give the Carnival its ability to travel through the Mists at will. What Madame Fortuna has neglected to mention is that, like the Vistani, the Skurra are affected by the night of lunaset. When the moon is full, the Carnival's resident Vistani disappear into the countryside, and the Carnival must remain at its current location until their return. This is rightfully thought to leave the campsite vulnerable, so the Carnival will usually choose a site that is isolated or believed to be uninhabited during these times.

Carnival to leave—and when our vardos leave, we vanish entirely, leaving no trail to follow.

This is the gift the Skurra give to her and to the Troupers in exchange for Isolde's protection. You have probably heard many stories of how the Vistani can lead giorgios to any land they wish to visit, no matter how distant. Well, those stories are true. When a Vistani tribe wishes to travel to a place, there are few powers in this Existence or the next that can stop us. Likewise, none can follow us unless we permit them to follow.

Reveal your next card. Ah, the Darklord. In this realm, there are forces of terrible evil, and they wield unspeakable power. This card signifies such creatures. "Darklord" describes them well enough, for now. Here is your new truth about . . .

Darklords and the Carnival

I think perhaps you know something about these lords of evil, no? Perhaps you travel with us because you are hiding from one of them. Then you well know the power such lords usually wield. Yet know this: *Within the Carnival's camp, the masters of evil wield no power.* If they are foolish enough to show themselves here, they quickly discover that the Carnival follows the will of Isolde, and no one else. Here, they must bow to her! It is true! I have witnessed even the powerful wizard lord of Hazlan reduced to a mewling babe in the presence of our great Mistress.

How can this be? How can it be that Isolde defies the power of these wicked creatures? The answer is simple, giorgio. She is much like them. Like the "darklords," she has forged a prison for herself with her own sins, and like the "darklords" she is the sole master of her own prison! But her protection only extends so far. That is why my kin always set up the vardos in a great ring, with Isolde's wagon at the center. Were we to stray too far from her, her protection would fall away from us. Of course, the Twisting would leave us too, for she and it travel as one.

The Carnival Domain

The Carnival shares some important qualities with Ravenloft domains. Like every domain, it has a lord who cannot leave it, but who wields great powers within it. Isolde appears to be limited to an area 300 feet in any direction from her vardo. However, since the Carnival can move, so can she, and her "domain" can superimpose itself upon others. Technically, it functions as a Floating Pocket (as described in the *Domains of Dread* rulebook). As a domain, it is often simply referred to as "Carnival."

For further detail, see page 64.

What is that you ask? The giorgio has so many questions! Draw another card. Yes, the Donjon. Imprisonment. I shall tell you of . . .

The Carnival and Closed Borders

This is why you came to us, no? You sought to flee from whatever fate pursued you, yet when you tried to cross the border into the safety of a neighboring land, you found yourself repelled, trapped by forces you still struggle to understand. Was it poisonous vapors? A song on the wind that chilled your bones? It matters not. All that matters is that you were trapped, and now we have freed you, for the chains others would use to shackle you have no power here in the Carnival.

Crossing Borders

Although virtually every master of Ravenloft's dark domains can magically seal the borders of his or her land, the Carnival it is not restricted by such obstacles. It can cross closed borders, even without relying on the Mist navigation of the Skurra. For details, see the Appendix.

Still more questions? Or do you have only one? Let us view your next card. Ah, the Raven. Very well. It is time for you to know . . .

THE SKURRA'S TRUTH ABOUT ISOLDE

I have no doubt that the Troupers told you they believe Isolde is a spirit of vengeance, come to watch over them from beyond the grave. Pah. The Troupers have no understanding of Isolde's power. They call her their "guardian angel," yet they do not believe their own words.

But that is exactly what she is. Isolde is an angel, an immortal being of great power, a force of limitless good. How do I know this? Madame Fortuna sees what needs to be seen! Perhaps you have heard legends of the "paladins." Those tales are true. The virtue of paladins is so powerful that it shines like a beacon in the night, and evil beings falter in its brilliance.

Isolde shines too, but her flame does not burn like a mere bonfire. No, she is like the burning sun itself! The forces of evil, the "darklords," can feel the white-hot edges of her power, but if they look directly into her light, it blinds them. Some of these "darklords" fear Isolde's power and let the Carnival pass. Other "darklords" try to destroy Isolde, and send their minions to end the agony her presence causes. Of course, Isolde destroys them. Sometimes a "darklord" is so powerful that he has no fear of Isolde, and comes to destroy her himself, but Isolde can sense his approach, and we are always gone before the evil can arrive.

Isolde's power stretches further than even this. Perhaps you have been told that Isolde is the source of the Twisting. This is true, and yet she does not create it. She merely causes it. Her power and virtue are so great that this evil-tainted land cannot tolerate theim, and it writhes beneath her feet. Anything and everything that remains too long near Isolde begins to warp and distort, as if reality itself shirks from her blinding light. Everything that is not shielded by the skurravera, of course. Isolde causes this reaction, but she fights it too, seeking to protect us. It is this tug of war that creates the Twisting. If Isolde were to remove her protection, everything around her would warp and twist until it had become something much worse than a freak. I would become . . . an abomination.

You doubt my tale? Perhaps you do not believe that an angel would freely come to our land of Mists. Ah, you are quite correct. No celestial being *would* ever willingly enter this existence of pain and suffering, but Isolde did not come here willingly. She allows the Troupers to keep their pretty view of her to assuage their fears, while in truth, she has fallen from grace.

What must Isolde have done to be cast down from her lofty heights? It must have been terrible indeed, but it is not our place to demand answers from a being of such power. Isolde has been cast out by her kind, and she has been claimed by the Mists, but that does not mean the embers of her virtue have died out entirely. The flames of goodness are not easily drowned in one such as she. She has sinned in the past, yes, but she is not like the other masters and lords in this realm. She does not wallow in her own depravity as they do.

No, Isolde is not damned, for she has not lost sight of her path to redemption. Just as she was cast out from her kind, she now offers a haven to others like herself. She offers protection for those who have nowhere else to go. She seeks out those who have fallen into shadow, those who have lost their way, and sees that they do not wander down the path of evil as she must have done. By saving these mortals, by saving us all, she hopes to redeem her virtue. And when she does, this existence will be able to hold her no longer. When she is freed, those who have served her faithfully shall be freed as well. When Isolde finds redemption, she shall find it for us all.

Ah, I sense that the vardo is about to stop, and the Mists have begun to part. It is time for us to part as well. I see you still doubt my revelations. You do not believe my claim that Isolde is a fallen angel, repenting her sins. Such doubt may be wise, giorgio. For I have told you the truth, but it is not the entire story. When you have seen what lies behind Pacali's curtains, you will understand the justice of Isolde. And you may find your own truth about her, different from mine. This does not surprise me; we all see what we *choose* to see.

Yes, you must go to the Hall of Horrors. The Familiar will lead you . . .

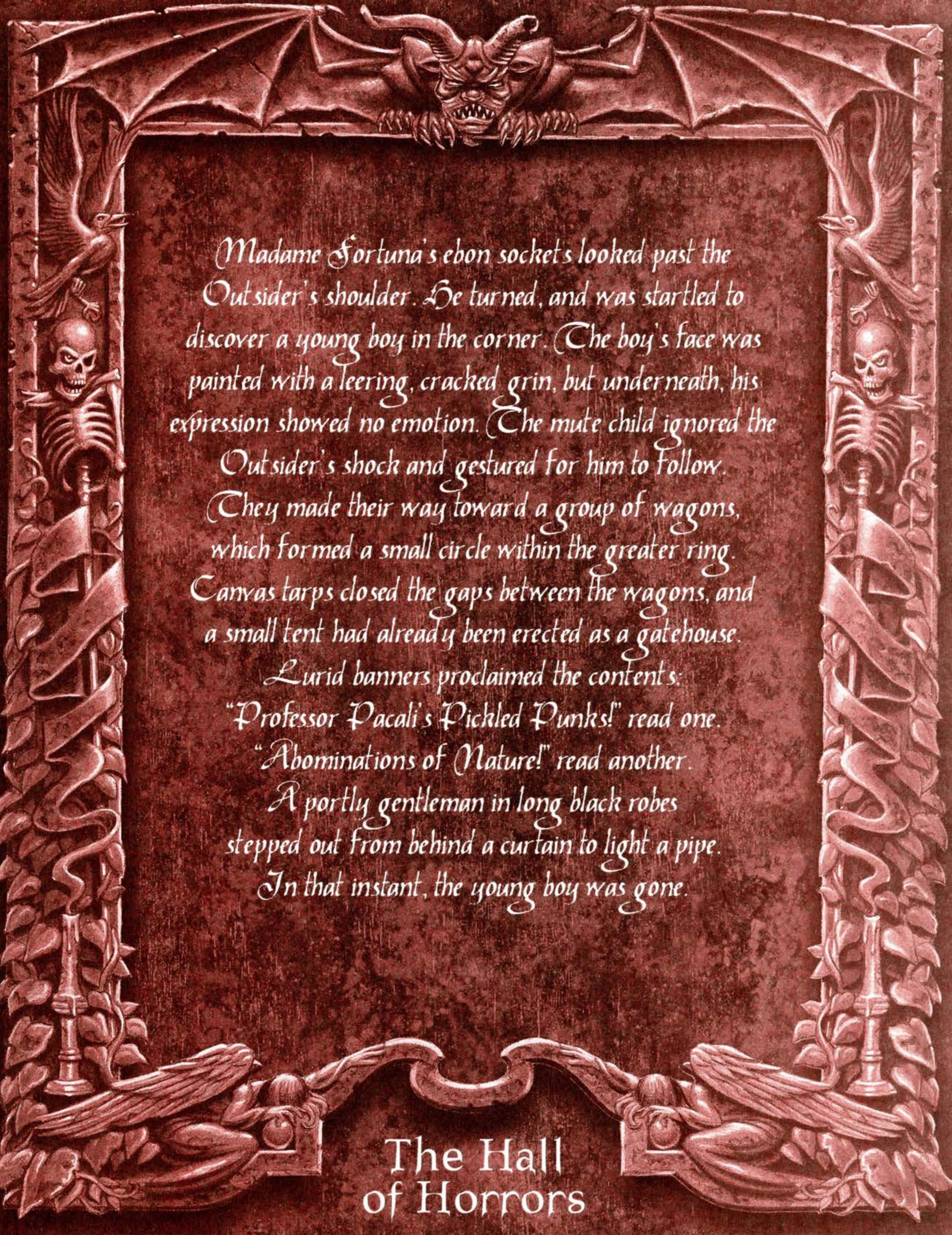
Where 'Angels' Tread

From beyond the misty veils of what Ravenloft's people consider "reality" come beings so great in power that they are personifications of good and evil. They are angels and fiends.

Each domain in the RAVENLOFT setting has at its heart an intensely evil man or woman who is its ultimate master. But to some extent, this control is usurped when these immensely powerful extraplanar beings enter their lands. Wherever these powerful fiends and angels tread, the land immediately around them warps and changes. When they move on, the land returns to normal. The phenomenon is exactly as Madame Fortuna described it. The scholar Rudolph Van Richten has observed the effect as well, dubbing it "a reality wrinkle."

Those schooled in arcana believe the Carnival itself may demonstrate this effect. The fact that the Carnival is always erected in a circular fashion with Isolde's vardo at its center lends credence to this view. However, there are no records of any such beings constructing actual settlements within their "reality wrinkles," as Isolde appears to have done. Of course, no one has ever written about an extraplanar being allying herself with a Vistani tribe, either.

Chapter Three and the final page of this book continue the discussion of Isolde's "reality wrinkle."



Madame Fortuna's ebon sockets looked past the Outsider's shoulder. He turned, and was startled to discover a young boy in the corner. The boy's face was painted with a leering, cracked grin, but underneath, his expression showed no emotion. The mute child ignored the Outsider's shock and gestured for him to follow. They made their way toward a group of wagons, which formed a small circle within the greater ring. Canvas tarps closed the gaps between the wagons, and a small tent had already been erected as a gatehouse. Lurid banners proclaimed the contents: "Professor Pacali's Pickled Punks!" read one. "Abominations of Nature!" read another. A portly gentleman in long black robes stepped out from behind a curtain to light a pipe. In that instant, the young boy was gone.

The Hall of Horrors

CHAPTER THREE

Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe.

—Robert Browning
Abt Vogler

PACALI AT YOUR SERVICE

Professor Pacali at your service, sir. I am the so-called barker for the Hall of Horrors. *Barker.* What a demeaning term. I worry for the mental health of those who would pattern their sense of self on stray dogs. But you are not a paying customer, so why don't we dispense with the lingo?

I have observed you being led around the Carnival, or should I say, "misled." You strike me as the sort who appreciates the straight truth, unfettered by backward gypsy superstition or by the misanthropic vernacular of a performing freak. Do you wish to know the true nature of Isolde's Carnival? You shall find it past that inner tent flap, but we must wait a moment before entering. The so-called Skurra are still preparing the Hall for presentation to the public. In the interim, allow me to properly welcome you to the Hall of Horrors.

This is the main event, what the others so crudely dub the "big squeeze." After that fraudulent buffoon Tindal shows the paying clientele a few worthy selections of our resident freaks, he drops them off here and leaves them to me. For an extra pair of coppers per individual, I admit them to the Hall, such as it is, where it is my task as lecturer to reveal monstrosities the likes of which put those misbegotten creatures outside to shame. Here we house the *true* horrors of the Carnival, or so goes the spiel.

In case you are wondering, my title is no mere "puckery." *Puckery;* such a quaint euphemism for fraud. No, Stranger, I assure you that I earned these robes, just as I earned the title of Professor. I am a true man of learning, not like several traveling charlatans I could name.

In my earlier days, before Isolde's Carnival tore my life from me, I was a tenured scholar at the Brautslava Institute in Darkon, studying matters of abnormal physiology. Of course I also lectured, graciously sharing my wisdom with particularly gifted students. Five years ago, the Carnival camped near the Institute's grounds, and—quite naively, I admit—I considered the physical deformities endemic to its performers to be fascinating, in the professional sense. Foolishly, I allowed my intellectual curiosity to get the better of me. I chose to take a sabbatical, traveling with the Carnival for a time to study these biological prodigies in depth.

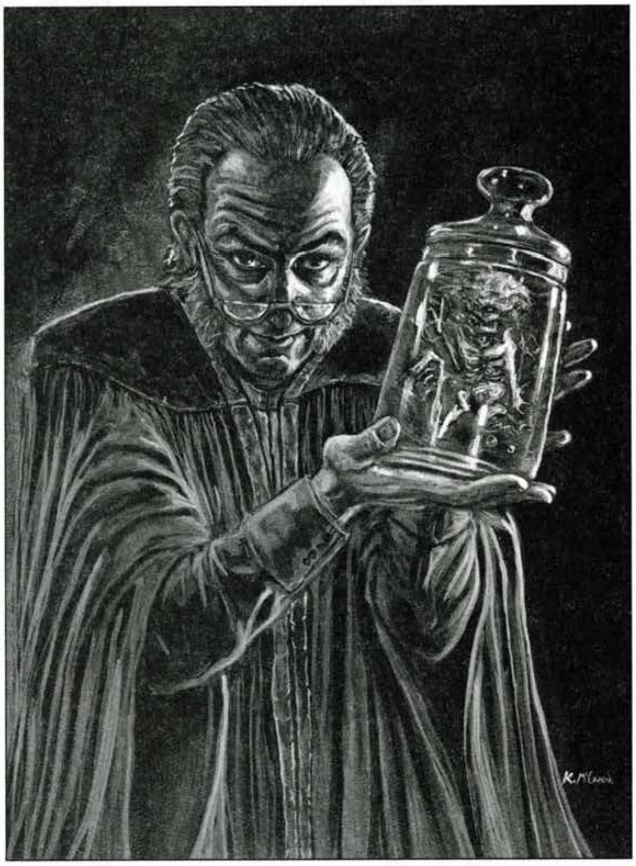
Have they warned you of the Twisting yet? They have? Mark yourself lucky and unusual on that count. Most who come to the Carnival are permitted to discover this wretched betrayal of the flesh on their own. Which is precisely the fate which befell me.

You are quite right. I have, through blind luck, escaped the more pronounced disfigurement which affects most of the Carnival's members. I am not a freak, like them, but the Twisting has still ensnared me such that I cannot return to the life I knew before. Precisely how I have been affected is no one's concern but my own.

Since the others consider my appearance regrettably mundane, I have found myself in the role of a guide. A lecturer, a barker, if you must. Step inside, into this canvas vestibule, as it were. I also earn my keep by procuring the bottled abnormalities you see displayed around you. They serve as a kind of *hors du ouvre* to whet the customers' appetite for the horrors lurking deeper within the tent. I like to call these bottled little wonders . . .

Pacali's Pickled Punks

Here, take a tinderbox. You can make yourself useful by helping me light the lanterns beneath the jars. I find lighting these small monsters from below helps



Professor Pacali

Professor Pacali is a man of many secrets, and a man who labors under intense shame. Once a respected scholar, he now languishes in obscurity as a lowly Carnival barker, his body altered by the Twisting. For this fall in stature, Pacali lays the blame squarely at the feet of Isolde, even while he denies the extent to which the Twisting has affected him. His most carefully guarded secret, that of how he acquires the Punks in his display, is also his greatest disgrace.

Every time Pacali's embittered mind starts to conjure up some new, petty scheme, his foul little fantasies are manifested in his flesh. Each and every one of Pacali's Punks sprouted from his own body. They are his stifled plans incarnate, all the repressed loathing he feels toward himself and those around him, the manifestation of every vile and hate-filled thought that stirs in his soul. And the Pickled Punks are quite alive.

It takes a Punk 1d6 months to develop fully on Pacali's body, forming a bud or tumor that tumbles off when mature. Only one forms at time. As it grows on his belly, he hides it beneath his loose robes. When the "birth" nears, however, Pacali typically takes a short "sabbatical" from his duties, returning to his home in Darkon to deal with the arrival of the new Punk. He also takes this opportunity to meet with an important character: his shadowy ally outside the Carnival. (See the final adventure in the Appendix.)

Unlike most Troupers, Pacali is not a devoted fan of Isolde. Since joining the Carnival, he has begun an intensive study of the forbidden arts and occult secrets, all in the hope of dispelling the Twisting and destroying its source. Thanks to these studies, the professor has gained the spellcasting abilities of an arcanist, a specialty mage described in *Domains of Dread.* (If you don't own this RAVENLOFT campaign book, consider Pacali a wizard who possesses the legend lore ability of a 9th-level bard, with knowledge restricted to the unnatural and the bizarre.) Although his spells are often drawn from dark sources, Pacali firmly identifies himself as a student of the White Arts, claiming that his spells simply reflect the nature of his foe.

Pacali keeps a second secret hidden from his allies. A year after joining the Carnival, he took a sabbatical, retreating to his home in Necropolis to dissect several creeplings and fidgets. During these experiments, he discovered that the Twisting is not a permanent change (see the DM's notes in Chapter One). However, by the time Pacali uncovered this secret, he had been in the Carnival too long for the knowledge to do him any good. Now, although some of his allies could potentially still benefit from this knowledge, he hoards his secret to maintain their loyalty.

Professor Pacali, human male, 9th-level arcanist: AC 10; MV 12; hp 26; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA spells; SD turn undead, spells; SZ M; ML elite (13); Str 11, Dex 9, Con 14, Int 17, Wis 10, Cha 15; AL NE.

to accentuate their inhuman nature. Vile little things, are they not? Each one a mixture of the innocent and the fiendish. I assure you these infernal infants are quite real, but just how I obtain them for my collection must remain a professional secret. Each one was born drawing breath, but they were all too wretched to live.

When I first started gathering my collection, I thought to call them "Demon Seeds," but our exalted mistress Isolde found that in bad taste. Such irony. However, when I mentioned to some of the Carny cretins that I preserved my sinister sucklings in alcohol, some freak or other hit upon "Professor Pacali's Pickled Punks." Although I found the name rather overblown at the time, I must now admit that it does carry a certain ring.

To halt their decay, the Punks must be kept secreted away beneath this canopy, hidden from the ravages of the sun. Of course, that also preserves their value as an exhibit. We wouldn't want them sitting out in the open, where they could see patrons—pardon me, where the patrons could see *them*—without paying. You must forgive my slip; I have spent years with these malformed creatures, yet even I still find them unnerving at times. Note how their dead eyes almost seem to follow you around the room. Eerie, is it not? Certainly worth the extra coins to see.

I assume you can hear the inhuman gibbering coming from behind the inner curtain—from within the Hall proper. Our helpful little gypsies must have finished digging the display pit. I'll take you into the Hall in a moment, but first, let us be sure you understand what you are about to face. If you were a regular customer, I would tell you that the Pickled Punks in the jars died at birth. And then I would tell you that monstrosities just like them lie behind the curtain—except that these creatures are alive and fully developed, having survived into adulthood. But that, of course, would be a lie. Had Tindal delivered you to my exhibit, he would have promised that within this ring of wagons we keep the only true horrors, the only true monsters, the only true freaks in all the Carnival. That too is a damned lie. Before we step into the ring, you must understand the true source of the horrors you are about to face. Your lecture now begins, with . . .

Pacali's Truth About Isolde

The truth is that we are all freaks here, all transformed into monsters by the one true horror at the heart of the Carnival: Isolde herself. What have you been told so far? That Isolde is a beneficent patron? That the Twisting is some bizarre form of justice? Perhaps Fortuna

Pickled Punks

Pickled Punks are hideous, unnatural infants, their features grotesquely distorted and monstrous. No two Punks are the same; one might have two bloated heads glaring into each other's eyes, while another might have more limbs than a spider. Although Pacali feels nothing but revulsion for these fetal fiends, he has found himself paralyzed by a gnawing fear every time he has attempted to harm one. The Punks in his display are still alive, though comatose due to the alcohol soaking into their tissues. However, if removed from its jar, a Punk can fully recover within 1d10 rounds. (On the other hand, an alert Punk must be kept submerged in its alcohol bath for 1d6 rounds before it will sink back into its stupor.)

An active Punk is a cruel and cowardly creature. It feels nothing but contempt for everything around it, and lives to spread chaos. Although the Punks have never attacked Pacali, he has only the most tenuous control over them.

Pickled Punks delight in tormenting anything small and defenseless, but they retreat to the shadows when faced with worthier opponents. When Punks do attack a man-sized victim, they do so in swarms, scrabbling all over his body, and biting with their fanged maws. Though a Punk's bite only inflicts 1d4 points of damage, once a Punk makes a successful attack, its jaws lock onto the victim. With jaws locked, the Punk can continue to gnaw, causing another 1d4 points of damage per round, without requiring further attack rolls. Characters set upon by a Punk must make a successful Bend Bars/Lift Gates roll to remove the creature.

Because of the alcohol saturating their stunted bodies, Punks are highly flammable. Any Punk successfully hit by a fire-based attack automatically ignites, and will typically skitter about like animate Greek fire, spreading the blaze until the flames finally consume its body. If a Punk is gnawing on a victim when ignited, its jaws will not release until it dies; until that time, the victim incurs damage from the flames equal to that suffered by the Punk.

Special Attacks: Pickled Punks are not difficult to destroy in combat. Their true threat is much more insidious. As manifestations of Pacali's suppressed schemes, they have the ability to unleash the repressed thoughts and emotions of others. They must stare at a target for a full turn to use this ability. This special gaze attack works even while a Punk "languishes" in a jar, in an alcohol-induced coma, and the target need not look into the Punk's eyes for the attack to be effective.

If the target fails a saving throw vs. spell, all his unspoken opinions, repressed thoughts, and unrealized desires boil to the surface. There are many Troupers with desires best left hidden; for example, Tindal's longing for the Serpent Mistress, or his jealousy toward the Man-Beast; the Imp's insane, suppressed brother; or the Brute's lust for power. If these sorts of characters succumb to the insidious stare of a Punk, their inhibitions will fall away, and for 1d8+2 hours they will act on their desires without concern for the consequences.

To make best use of the Punks during a game, pay careful attention to the heroes and their unfulfilled intentions or desires. If a player states his or her hero's intent to take an action, but then fails to follow through—perhaps because someone objects—that unrealized intent becomes fodder for the Punks. Alternately, heroes who fall under a Punk's influence might simply decide to declare their love for someone they've admired from afar. Or they may decide to reclaim some magical trinket they lost out on when the party divided its loot. Or perhaps the target of a Punk's gaze will suddenly act on his or her festering wish to be rid of an annoying companion. The possibilities are limited only by your ability to uncover the heroes' hidden motivations or unfulfilled desires.

Characters under the influence of a Punk's stare are acting in accordance their own unspoken, unfulfilled wishes; they are not under the direct control of the Punk. Any attempts to *detect charm* on the affected character will fail. Strangely, those who fall prey to a Punk do exhibit a different telltale sign—they bear the unmistakable stench of alcohol.

Pickled Punks (27): AC 6; MV 6; HD 2; hp 10; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4; SA gnaw, insidious stare; SW fire; SZ T (1′–2′ tall); ML unsteady (7); Int average (8); AL CE; XP 65.

offered you her fumbling theories of mystic prisons and fallen angels.

Everything you've been told to this point has been a lie. A lie those freaks tell themselves to avoid the real truth. A lie that makes their existence tolerable. Fortunately, some of us have the courage to face the truth of our situation, bleak as it may be.

I can sum up Madame Fortuna's hobbled explanation of the Twisting in a few words, and I can be more accurate as I do so. Fortuna believes Isolde is an angel, cast down from the heavens. She is correct, in that Isolde is an inhuman entity of immense power, one which originates in a plane of existence beyond our comprehension. The mistake made by Fortuna and her kind is that, when they seek to discover Isolde's place of origin, they peer at the skies, when they should be looking down. Here is the pure truth: Isolde is a demon from the deepest Abyss, and the Twisting is caused by her reality wrinkle.

You look confused. Perhaps I have overestimated your ability to grasp such things. Very well, I shall explain further, and take you into my trust. You see, I have a certain ally outside the Carnival, a gentleman who prefers to remain anonymous; if Isolde learned of his defiance of her will, it would surely cost him his life. During one of my sabbaticals away from this freak show, this gentleman sought me out. He opened my eyes to Isolde's true nature, and answered all my questions by presenting me with a most invaluable tome.

That book is entitled *Guide to Fiends,* and it was penned by Rudolph van Richten, one of the greatest students of the unnatural in all the domains. Have you read it? I thought not; you don't strike me as the academic type. No matter. Let us examine Fortuna's theory. She claims that Isolde is a being of intense "goodness." She also insists our entire world is tainted with evil; presumably she includes decent folk such as you and I among their number. She claims that Isolde's mere presence thus frays the fabric of reality, and that the phenomenon we know as the Twisting is the result of Isolde's attempts to limit this damage. A rather overworked theory, in my opinion. And I have found that in most scholarly matters, the simplest explanation is the most accurate.

Isolde is a demon, and her corruption seeps into the reality around her. Within this aura, Isolde's power is so vast that she can bend reality to her whims. This aura of evil, called a reality wrinkle, at least in Dr. Van Richten's work, radiates far enough from Isolde to fit the entire Carnival within it. I have measured its extent by observing the transformations that are visited upon the poor creatures that become the creeplings. It extends 300 paces from her person in all directions, almost precisely the diameter of the Carnival, after the Skurra have circled the wagons.

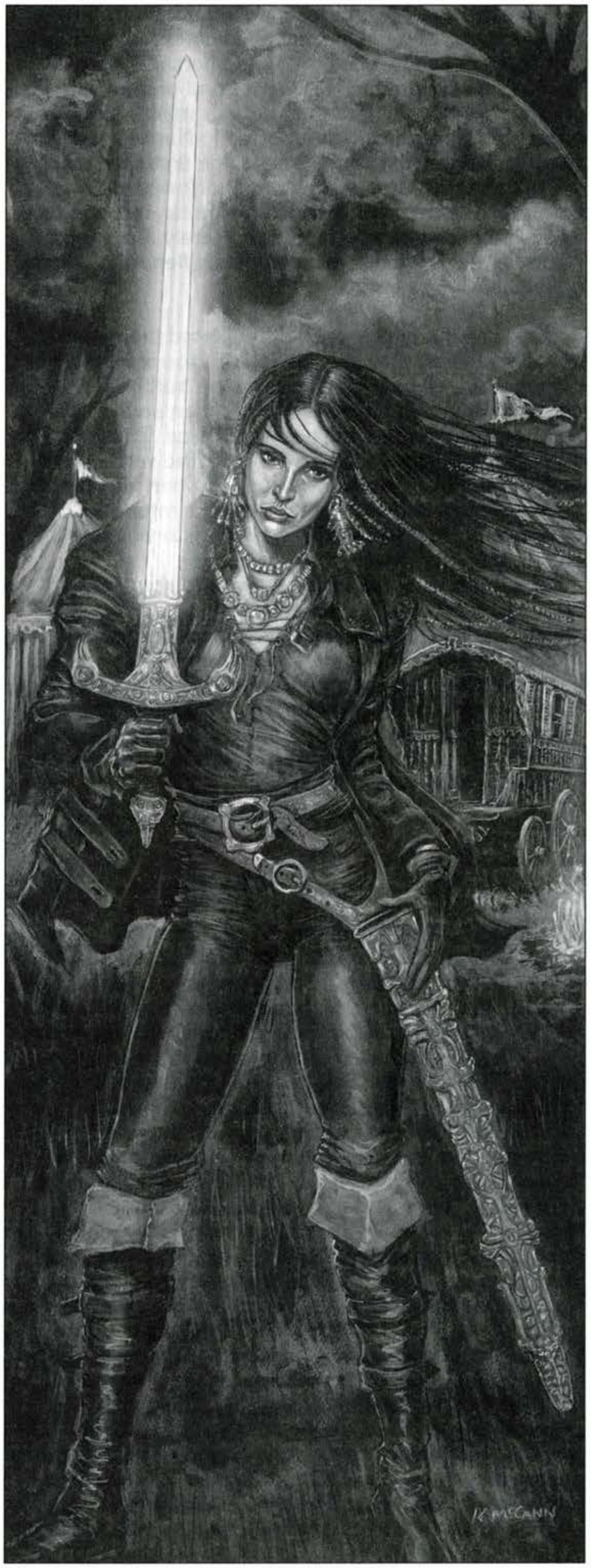
Isolde is indeed the direct source of the Twisting, but she does not warp people's bodies to make everyone "equal" or "honest," as her faithful claim. Her fiendish goal is simply to make everyone monstrous. To transform these downtrodden, easily manipulated cretins into creatures who can never find acceptance amid a normal, decent society. She thus shackles us all into her servitude, and, most obscenely, she makes her victims love her for it.

Isolde the Fiend?

Pacali's theory that Isolde is actually the succubus known as Elsepeth is based on her description in *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends,* a RAVENLOFT accessory. (While that book is currently out of print, its contents are included in *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Volume III,* slated for release in 2000.) Van Richten describes Elsepeth as an evil entity driven by the desire to corrupt mortals. Pacali certainly believes that Isolde shares this goal. Further, Elsepeth's reality wrinkle is roughly the same size as Isolde's.

Pacali's theory falters in other areas, however. No fiend studied by Van Richten, including Elsepeth, has shown Isolde's ability to reshape living things within its reality wrinkle. Yet Pacali himself would argue that Van Richten uncovered evidence of fiends being able to perform rituals that allowed them to draw energy from the land and gain extra powers linked to the site of the rituals. The professor believes Isolde performed such rites in a place Van Richten never visited.

To discover the truth or falsehood in Pacali's theories, see the final page in this book.



A shame you haven't read Dr. Van Richten's book; certain circumstantial evidence indicates Isolde may in fact be a succubus formerly calling herself Elsepeth. Isolde first appeared to Hermos's band of freaks in northern Falkovnia, less than a day's march south of Nartok. Elsepeth was last reported in Nartok, and vanished at roughly the same time Isolde first appeared, shortly after the Grand Conjunction. However, I freely admit there exists some evidence against this connection, so the identification remains merely a pet theory. Nonetheless, the basic fact of Isolde's fiendish nature is undeniable.

Ah, I see the gypsies have completed their excavation. I invite you now into the Hall of Horrors itself. For the moment, I'll ask you to ignore the burbling, hissing, and moaning, and all the other inhuman sounds which emanate from behind the heavy curtains. Those curtains drape the so-called lock-boxes, the vardos with bars. I must warn you to be cautious when we're inside. Do not step too close to the pit in the center of our circular "hall." That low, wooden barrier surrounding the edge is as flimsy as it appears.

Now I would like to introduce you to some associates. No, these people I've gathered are not the so-called "horrors" you've been promised. I am saving that tour for the end. These are simply more Troupers, just like the others you have met, with the misfortune, perhaps, of being more Twisted. And unlike the others, I count them among my true friends. *Troupers*—again a pathetic reliance on euphemism. Why not call the Carnival what it is? Why not call it . . .

THE FREAK SHOW

Now, before I make the introductions, I feel I should warn you that some of my allies have what you might consider a "checkered past." Sadly, this is to be expected; that diabolic creature Isolde seems to take particular pleasure in weeding out those who have fallen into shadow, as the case may be. She gathers up people who have lost their moral compass, those who are teetering dangerously on the brink between good and evil. She then corrupts their bodies, thus isolating them from any decent person who might have led the poor soul back into the light.

However, it's not my place to judge my fellow man; I freely admit I am not without flaws myself. All I ask of you is that you greet my associates with an open mind. Regardless of any regrettable deeds in their past, they are all now united by a noble cause. Out of all the Carnival folk, my associates are the only ones able to see through Isolde's honey-coated lies. They are the only ones willing to admit that the Twisting has nothing to do with metaphysical justice. They are the only ones willing to admit that they have been transformed into monsters, and they are the only ones willing to do whatever it takes to save our souls—*all* our souls, Stranger, even yours.

Now that you understand the situation, I would like you to meet the first of my allies. Not so long ago, he

The Gargantuan

The Gargantuan is encumbered by a thousand pounds of unnatural fat. He can barely move under his own power, but the Twisting has made up for this blow by enhancing what was already a silver tongue. For his entire life, Rasulid was a charming loafer, skilled at persuading others to work for him while they received little in return. He typically forced his sister Mola to support them both. When the pair came to the Carnival, the Twisting shifted this imbalance. Now, just as Rasulid coerces others to "carry his weight," he must return the favor.

Although he is still learning about his new abilities, Rasulid has the innate talent to *command* others at will, mimicking the effects of the 1st-level priest spell. However, whenever anyone follows one of Rasulid's commands, they shed five pounds, and he gains one.

Mola is apparently immune to her brother's silver tongue, but she has spent so much of her life as his lackey that the Twisting has forged a special bond between them. Rasulid literally feeds off his sister; everything she eats adds to his bulk. Further, Rasulid doesn't need magic to convince his sister to do his bidding. She is so accustomed to serving him, so perpetually browbeaten, that she usually obeys his requests out of sheer habit, and without hesitation—at least as long as she can't see any harm in his wishes. Like some poor pet, she does not wish to disappoint her master.

The only benefit Rasulid enjoys from the unnatural layer of blubber encasing his body is that he suffers half damage from blunt weapon attacks. The Gargantuan is repulsed by his condition, and he desperately wants to be normal again, but nothing he's done has helped him shed so much as a pound, including a five-year fast. This has only increased Mola's hunger, and the more she eats, the heavier he becomes, and the more she wastes away.

Rasulid does have one means of shedding his bulk, but he probably will never discover it: If he were to perform a single act of true generosity, helping another while accepting nothing in return, he would lose five pounds. The person benefiting from his act of kindness would gain one pound in turn. In short, simply by leading a generous life, Rasulid could slim down. Mola could also help. Were she to start living her own life instead of slaving to please Rasulid, she might slow her own weight loss, and thereby impede her brother's life-threatening expansion.

Rasulid believes that Isolde's death will end the Twisting, and will thus restore his body. Though he is largely confined to his wagon, he serves Pacali's cause using his network of assistants, whom he commands with his silver tongue.

Rasulid Kravvan, human male, 7th-level fighter: AC 10; MV 3; hp 50; THAC0 ; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA *command*; SD half damage from blunt attacks; SZ L; ML elite (13); Str 17, Dex 3, Con 8, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 16; AL NE.

was a normal fellow, just as normal as you are now. Then the Twisting tainted his flesh. Is it not bad enough that he now suffers from this infirmity? Why add insult to injury by calling him . . .

The Gargantuan

This poor, grotesque soul would prefer if you call him by his true name, Rasulid Kravvan. I assume you have met his sister, Mola, the Living Skeleton? You should be honored to see Rasulid here; it was no small feat for a man of his considerable girth to leave his wagon.

Like Mola, Rasulid was quite sound when he first came to the Carnival, a darkly handsome Rashemi. What lies before you now is over half a ton of blubbery flesh. It does not matter that Rasul abstains from food. Indeed, he has not eaten a bite since the Twisting effected his atrocious swelling, yet he continues to gain weight—at least sixty pounds a year. Those gypsy clowns have had to reinforce his wagon twice, and it's the largest in the camp. If this Twisting does not end, the day will surely come when no wagon will be able to support him. He will be left behind, being helplessly smothered by his own weight.

When Rasulid first came to the Carnival, he personally oversaw a number of games of chance and tests of skill. Now, his bulk largely restricts him to his display wagon, and he must rely on the assistance of others to survive. And for what sin did he deserve such disfigurement? Rigging a few games? Separating a few fools from their money? Perhaps not behavior I can condone, but surely you see that the punishment exceeds the crime.

Now, Stranger, I would like to introduce you to Tenira Courant—or, as the atrociously exaggerated banners announce her . . .

The Squid Woman

When the original members of the Carnival first visited Darkon, they were cast out as monsters. When they went back three years later under the leadership of Isolde, they were invited to perform for Azalin Rex himself. Naturally, Isolde's presence gave the Troupe a certain level of respect in the eyes of our fallen monarch.

The Carnival went to Castle Avernus, and Azalin paid the freaks very well for their performance. The troupe gained something else, too. Shortly after this visit, the Carnival picked up a new guest, a so-called Mongrel. She was a rather plain pickpocket, and it went entirely unnoticed that she also a Kargat agent, one of Azalin's spies. The monarch was no idiot, you see; he knew Isolde was very special, and he had ordered this spy to observe Isolde's actions. However, the agent was not warned of the Twisting. In respect to my late king, I shall assume that Azalin was not aware of this phenomeon, and thus had no warning to offer.

And so, Stranger, I present Tenira Courant once

The Squid Woman

Very few Troupers know that the Squid Woman came to the Carnival as a Kargat spy. No one—perhaps not even Isolde—knows an even deeper secret: Tenira is a true lycanthrope, a lesser seawolf originally from Martira Bay. Because she seldom changes her human shape, Tenira has been able to hide her lycanthropy from even her closest allies for a decade.

Besides her human form, Tenira has two others: She can become a large, wolf-headed seal, or a humanoid, wolflike hybrid. In all three forms, she retains the tentacle clusters that have replaced her hands and lower arms. In either seawolf or hybrid form, Tenira has a biting attack, which inflicts 2d4 points of damage. Her bite carries the standard risk of lycanthropic infection, but if Tenira learns that she has infected a victim, she will quickly and quietly assassinate him before he can succumb to the disease. The lives of her victims are meaningless when they threaten her secrets. Due to the alteration of her arms, she never gains any claw attacks. Unlike many lycanthropes, she has no resistance to normal weapons.

It's not often that the Carnival camps near coastlines, Tenira's native environment, and she has often wondered why Azalin chose her of all people to spy on Isolde. Increasingly, she fears his reason was simply that she was expendable; he needed a pair of eyes near the Carnival, and he risked as little as possible to attain that goal.

When Tenira first came to the Carnival, she had no skills as a thief, and she relied on *gauntlets of dexterity* to pick the Georges' pockets. The transformation of her hands actually heightened her manual dexterity, granting her the talent she only feigned before. Unfortunately, the Twisting left her unable to wear gloves, bracers, or rings of any kind, including her invaluable gauntlets.

Tenira is an unimaginative and ruthless character. Fittingly, she acts as Pacali's main enforcer. Although she has resented Isolde for years, until Pacali joined the Carnival, Tenira had never done much about her resentment. She is more comfortable following orders than she is giving them, a quality that makes her well suited to serving Pacali.

Although the Squid Woman almost always remains in human form, she does occasionally succumb to the bloodlust of her kind. It is rare, but not entirely unknown, for the ravaged corpse of some unlucky George to be discovered after the Carnival has moved on.

Tenira Courant, female seawolf (lesser), F7: AC 6; MV 12, swim 12; hp 44; THAC0 14; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon (2d4); SZ M; ML elite (14); Str 14, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 11, Wis 13, Cha 16; AL NE.

Thief Abilities: PP 45, OL 30, CW 25.

more, for she is the very Kargat agent of whom I speak. I assure you, when I learned of Tenira's true loyalties, I was just as shocked as you must be now. As a son of Darkon, I was raised to fear Azalin's secret police, but I assure you, everyone standing here at this moment knows who our foe truly is. Take it as a sign of Isolde's menace that I can stand by a Kargat and confidently declare her my ally. In fact, you might say Tenira is my "right hand man."

Forgive my insensitive humor; Tenira hates it when I call her that. As you can see, she is no man, and she has no hands. Like Rasulid, like myself, like all decent people who linger too long near Isolde, Tenira was quite normal when she first came here. Then the Twisting claimed her, of course—as you can see for yourself. Now she has no shapely forearms, no lovely hands or fingers, just a writhing cluster of pinkish tentacles sprouting from each arm just below the elbow. At least the tentacles are functional. She can still grasp objects, and may even shake the hand of anyone who is not too squeamish.

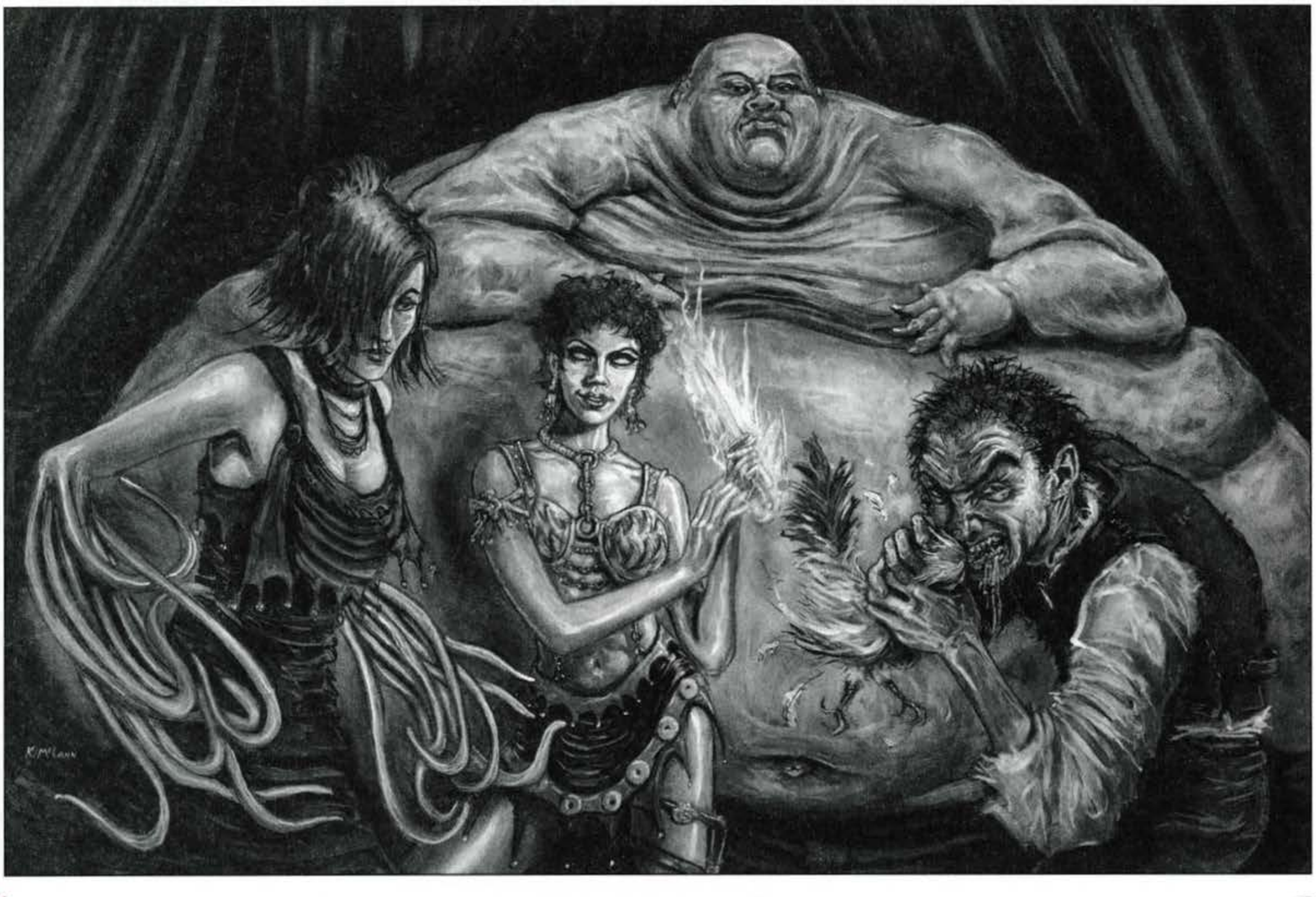
And why did she receive this fate? Perhaps it was Isolde's way of indicating that she knew Tenira's true purpose for joining us. Perhaps Isolde was simply marking Tenira as Azalin's tentacle. Whatever Isolde's purpose for warping this poor woman, it made Tenira entirely unsuited to work as a spy. What good is an agent who can't even pass as a normal person?

Sadly, the result was predictable. Azalin eventually lost interest in Isolde, or so it seemed, and he abandoned his now-useless assistant. Essentially, he damned Tenira to this living purgatory. By the time I arrived and we joined forces, she had been all but forgotten by her superiors. Now, with Azalin gone, she truly has nowhere else to go.

Now I direct you to another gentleman. Born to nobility, he has been dashed to the very nadir of human existence. None of the freaks here even call him by his given name; they just call him . . .

The Geek

His name represents more of that crude Carnival slang that Tindal and his crew are always spouting. Here, to "geek" something means to slaughter it, as a butcher would do to a pig. This young man's given name is Roman Olzanik, and he is the eldest son of a minor baron in Borca. One particularly harsh winter, there was a knock at his door. He happened to be passing through the foyer when a manservant answered that knock to reveal a thin and shivering peasant girl from nearby Vor Ziyden. The girl explained that her family had brought in a poor harvest that year, and that they had no more food. She



fell on her knees, begging the wealthy Olzaniks to give her family enough sustenance to survive to the spring.

Again, I must remind you that many here at the Carnival have done regrettable things in the past. I ask again that you judge them not by such deeds, but by the repentance now in their hearts. Roman was disgusted with the girl's laziness, and he had her thrown off his family grounds.

The next day, when Roman went out to hunt pheasant, he found the girl's lifeless, frozen body lying in the road, not far from the edge of the Olzanik estate. A dreadful chill went down his spine, and he returned to his home with a strange fear gnawing at his belly. That night, as a fine dinner was served to Roman and his family, he discovered that the exquisite cuisine made him violently ill.

What judgment truly fell here? None can say. Perhaps the starving peasant girl cursed him with her dying breath. Perhaps he was struck down by pernicious higher powers, if you believe the quaint folk tales. The unavoidable truth is that Roman paid for his misdeed long before the Twisting enacted its "justice." Never again could he enjoy his fine foods. He began to starve, in fact, and only through sheer desperation did he discover that he could survive, but only on the most sickening and rancid of meals. He was reduced to eating refuse, table scraps, garbage. That rotten food tastes just as foul to Roman as it would to you or I, but we all must do what is necessary to survive. There is a bright side to his degradation; Roman now seems to be immune to all toxins, and can taste them in his food.

Eventually, his disgusted family threw Roman out into the cold. Totally unprepared to support himself, he was living as a ragged beggar when Isolde drew him into her fold, just a year before I arrived. Did his life change for the better? Far from it. Now he is displayed in a caged wagon, kept away from that savage Man-Beast in the same vardo by nothing more than a thin wooden wall. Roman is portrayed as a subhuman, and he eats all manner of filth for the benefit of a paying audience—live frogs and chickens being his specialty. Offstage, the freaks compel him to act as a food taster when they purchase supplies; if Roman gets sick, the food is safe to eat. The Twisting has also added to his insult; his skin has become jaundiced, his features sunken, his teeth long and sharp. If you ask me, Isolde's corruption has turned him into a living ghoul.

But Roman has repented the errors of his youth, my friend. He is now a generous soul, and none of my allies are more dedicated to the destruction of our infernal foe.

You could say that my next associate is tenured here at the Carnival, as I was at the Institute. You can call her what you wish; her true name is unknown even to her. In the Carnival l'Morai, she was called Charlotte. Here, she has been proclaimed . . .

The Geek

Desperate, fearful, and obsequious, the Geek has become Pacali's most obedient lackey. Cursed by his own cruelty long before he joined the Carnival, he now behaves as though he has totally reformed his selfish ways. But he has not changed his underlying nature; he merely behaves decently out of fear, for he is terrified that the "powers above" might punish him once again.

Roman has latched on to Pacali's quest to destroy Isolde. He desperately believes that by helping the Professor destroy a "demon," he may redeem himself in the eyes of the faceless powers that have so harshly judged him. His most fervent desire is to be restored to normal, so he can return to his ancestral home and once again live a life of petty self-gratification.

The Geek is immune to all ingested poisons, and he can identify such poisons by taste. The Twisting has given him a dangerous bite, all the better to gnaw on his inedible meals. When he sinks his teeth into something, or someone, he inflicts d4 points of damage. Because of the rancid meals he ingests, his bite also carries the risk of infection. Anyone bitten by the Geek must succeed at a saving throw vs. poison or suffer a debilitating disease, as detailed under the 3rd-level priest spell *cure disease.*

Roman Olzanik, human male, 0-level: AC 10; MV 12; hp 6; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (bite); SA disease; SD poison immunity; SZ M; ML unsteady (7); Str 10, Dex 11, Con 18, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 16; AL LE.

The Fire Eater

Yes, Charlotte is part of Hermos's original troupe, one of those freaks who escaped from the Puppet Show in l'Morai. She's a gifted entertainer, and she presents one of our most exciting acts. Even I find her talents impressive. Just be sure to keep your distance when she begans to spew fire from her lips. And that's not all she does. She can cause her knives to burst into flame simply by running their edges across her palms. She then juggles the burning blades, creating a—how does Tindal put it?—yes, a "whirling firestorm" which leaves her completely unscathed.

Stranger, meet Charlotte. Charlotte, meet a new potential friend. I noticed that twinge of pain when you shook her hand, but don't worry; your mind isn't playing tricks with you. She truly is uncomfortably hot to the touch. Charlotte performed her fire act all the way back in l'Morai, and she is little changed. The Twisting seems to have been kind to her. I wasn't here when the Twisting began, mind you, so I'm not certain whether her swirling, red and orange eyes and fiery red hair are meant to be a reflection of her hot disposition, or vice versa. For some reason, I consider it rude to ask. I can tell you that she has spent all her years under Isolde's banner sweltering in the unnatural heat of her own blood.

You see, Charlotte is a walking powder keg, and I mean that in a very literal sense. Fortunately, she won't explode, but her breath and her blood are both more potent than an alchemist's most incendiary concoction. I'm sure Tindal or one of those other freaks has told you the tale of the Carnival de l'Morai and the Puppet Master; no need to repeat that bit of melodrama. Charlotte was one of the performers there, banished to the Puppet Show and altered to reflect her so-called "failings." She was also robbed of all memory of her former life, and she never did learn who she really was, or what crime she had committed to be so cruelly punished. I fear that her experience with the Puppet Master has haunted Charlotte ever since, and left her a touch temperamental. Have no fear; I count Charlotte as a close friend, and she is a trusted ally in the cause. I am simply warning you not to cross her.

The Fire Eater

The Fire-Eater is immune to all nonmagical fire. She can produce fire two ways: with her breath, and with her blood.

By breathing over an open flame—as she does during her act, when she blows on a lit torch—Charlotte can spit forth a gout of flame with a range and an effect equal to the 1st-level wizard spell *burning hands*.

Her blood is even more potent; on contact with air, it automatically ignites. Whenever she suffers damage from an edged weapon, her blood spatters, coming in contact with any object or character with a 5-foot radius. This blood ignites in the following round; for each point of damage she suffers, her blood causes 1d4 points of damage in turn, and may ignite flammable objects before it burns itself away. This damage is spread evenly among all targets in range, according to your discretion as the DM. The palms of Charlotte's hands are laced with dozens of scars. She slices her palms in order to set her juggling knives on fire during her act.

Her hot-blooded talents do come with a price, however. When hit with a cold-based attack, Charlotte suffers an extra point of damage for each damage die rolled.

Charlotte is a passionate, mercurial woman. Unlike most of Pacali's accomplices, Charlotte she is not convinced that Isolde is a ghost, or a demon, or anything else. Charlotte simply considers Isolde a mystery. However, she *is* convinced that Isolde is the source of the Twisting, and she believes that if Isolde can transform normal people into freaks, then Isolde can be forced to turn freaks into normal people too. The Fire-Eater doesn't care whether or not Isolde is destroyed; she just wants to win normal lives for all her friends.

Charlotte, human female, 4th-level thief: AC 8; MV 12; hp 24; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA flame breath; SD immune to fire, fiery blood; SW cold; SZ M; ML elite (14); Str 10, Dex 16, Con 16, Int 13, Wis 11, Con 14/7; AL CN.

Thief Abilities: PP 60, OL 60, F/RT 40, MS 25, HS 5, DN 25, CW 60, RL 0.

And now, there is one more ally I would like you to meet. Actually, in a sense, you have already met him. He is not a member of the Carnival; in fact, it's vital that Isolde remain ignorant of his existence. Charlotte, Roman, would you please be kind enough to pull the curtain down from that standing mirror? Ah, bless you. Interesting reflection in that mirror, wouldn't you agree, Stranger? Look around. Who's here? You, I, my five associates; so I assume you would like me to tell you who that eighth fellow is in the reflection. Stranger, meet my most powerful and valuable ally here at the Carnival, the infamous illusionist . . .

Tindafulus

I can see it in your eyes. You think that once again your mind might be playing games with you. You can't shake the conviction that you have seen this man before. Fear not, Stranger. In a sense, you are quite correct. My associate has been appraising you from the moment you first approached Hermos, but Tindafalus is trapped behind that silvered glass. Every mirror is a window between our world and his, and Tindafalus can appear in any reflection, but beyond that, I'm afraid his contact is terribly limited. He can watch, he can listen, but he can never touch anything outside the netherworld he inhabits.

But that's not it, is it? Yes, you've seen glimpses of Tindafalus out of the corner of your eye, perhaps distorted in a puddle, or lurking in a pane of glass? But that is not why his face seems so damned familiar, is it? Allow me to elucidate for you.

Look closely at Tindafalus. Study his features. Now, fill out that gaunt face. Straighten that broken nose, shed about thirty years of age, and snuff that spark of righteous fury from his eyes. Yes, now you have it. The spitting image of Tindal! Or rather, this man is who Tindal pretends to be. That fetch calling itself Tindal stole the very existence of poor Tindafalus.

But to the point, this rogue reflection is the one, true Tindafalus, famed creator of the Memory Mirrors! I'm confident that the verbose impostor Tindal has already told you his life story, and his version is actually in a large part correct. Curiously, "Tindal"—as that man, that thing now calls itself—always seems to forget the little detail that *he* is the fetch. He is on the wrong side of the mirror. The real Tindafalus has been sealed in the spirit world since 745, and his idealized reflection has usurped his life.

Tindafalus now finds himself in a rather frustrating situation. To reverse the process, and release himself

Tindafalus

Tindafalus has spent seven years trapped in the shadowy world of reflections, cut off from reality. In life, he was known for being amoral when pursuing his research. His years spent in isolation have added bitterness and ruthlessness to his character.

Though Tindal is described as a fetch by Pacali, that's like "living in the past." Tindafulus is the one who lies in the mirror world, and now he must be considered a unique fetch himself. In fact, he has become an exceptionally powerful version of the Ravenloft fetch.

Some of Ravenloft's sages believe that mirrors are actually windows to the spirit world, and reflections are spirits linked to their doubles in the real world. A Ravenloft fetch is a reflection that has broken away from its real world counterpart, seeking to steal its double's place outside the silvered glass. When these fetches break the bond between themselves and their double, they become gaunt and gray in appearance (in this twisted situation, separation from his double has made Tindafalus appear even more wizened and ghastly than he once was).

Tindafalus can be frustratingly difficult to face in combat; any *physical* attacks that might be aimed at him in the mirror world simply damage the mirror, not him. However, destroying, covering, or blessing a mirror robs Tindafalus of his ability to utilize it. In short: no reflection, no access for Tindafalus.

Although Tindafalus cannot make physical attacks, he can cast spells through mirrors into the real world, almost as if gazing out a window. However, he cannot target his spells on anything that is not visible in a reflection, be it out of view, invisible, or even a vampire. He can be considered to possess every spell in the *Player's Handbook* from the magical schools of Illusion, Enchantment/Charm, and Lesser Divination, as well as a handful of other spells used in the construction of magical objects. To Tindafalus's great frustration, he cannot create magical items while in the mirror world, since the only construction materials he can access are merely shadowy reflections of reality.

It should be noted that Tindal, the carny barker, has no idea that he is not the "real" Tindafalus. Ironically, he is a better man than his "true self" could ever hope to be.

Tindafalus, Ravenloft fetch, I16: AC 4; MV 12; hp 52; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg special; SA spells; SD spells; SW see above; SZ M; ML steady (11); Str 12, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 17, Wis 11, Cha 9; AL NE.

Spreading Misery: Creating New Fetches

In his years behind the glass, Tindafalus has developed a dangerous new spell, *sunder reflection*. The only copy of this 5th-level spell lies in Tindafalus's private spellbooks, within the mirror world. The spell has a casting time of a full turn; if Tindafalus successfully casts the magic on the reflection of a living target, the target must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation. If the target fails this saving throw, the bond with his reflection is severed, and the reflection immediately becomes a Ravenloft fetch.

Any character with a sundered fetch shows no reflection in mirrors. If the fetch is "killed," it will return to its proper place, restored to a normal reflection. The bond between a character and his reflection is very powerful, and Tindafalus's spell cannot sever that bond forever. A fetch freed by this magic must make a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation each hour to maintain its independence. As soon as the fetch fails, it becomes a normal reflection once more. In the meantime, however, it strives to free itself from the mirror world forever.

Standard Ravenloft fetches are visible as ghastly, aberrant representations of their doubles. They are not completely trapped in the mirror, but fortunately they only can emerge only to attack their doubles, and each is harmless to anyone other than that specific individual. (Tindafalus does possess this ability, but he has never used it for fear of Isolde.) While the fetch is outside the mirror world, it is vulnerable to spells and physical attacks, but it can only be harmed by magical weapons of at least +1 enchantment. In addition, a Ravenloft fetch loses 1 hit point each round it remains outside a mirror.

With a successful attack, the fetch drains one experience level from its double. If a fetch succeeds at completely draining its double, it steals its victim's place in the real world. For all practical purposes, the character doesn't change, except that he or she takes on a Chaotic Evil alignment. Unlike vampires and Tindafulus, these unusual characters do cast a reflection in mirrors, and the reflection seems almost normal. Close examination reveals a subtle difference in the reflection's eyes, however; they are always haunted and fearful.

Fetch, Ravenloft: AC 4; MV 6; HD *; hp *; THAC0 *; #AT 1; Dmg special; SA level drain; SV special; SZ *; ML elite (14); Int *; AL CE; XP varies.
* These statistics match the scores of the real-world double.

back into the world of the living, he must face Tindal again. His dilemma is that Tindal now clings to Isolde's apron strings, and if Isolde becomes aware that Tindafalus is here, she may well have the power to destroy him even while he is trapped the spirit world. To save himself, Tindafulus must remove Isolde from the equation. I think you can see how his interests intersect with ours.

Tindafulus is an invaluable spy for the cause. Not even Isolde can detect him, for the simple reason that he doesn't really exist; he's just a trick of the light. I've learned a host of illuminating truths about the Carnies through his assistance. Sadly, we've never been able to closely watch Isolde herself. Tindafalus can only see those parts of our world reflected in mirrors. There no reflective surfaces within Isolde's wagon, and she never tarries before a mirror anywhere else. Because Tindafulus can see through virtually *any* uncloaked mirror, he acts as my undetectable messenger, the liaison who carries messages shared by me and my special ally outside the Carnival.

So now you've met my allies. Not quite a ten-in-one, but still respectable, I should think. Now it is time for you to learn that this quest to destroy Isolde is no game. We run a terrible risk by opposing Isolde. Those who harm her servants, and those who dare betray Isolde herself, are subject to Isolde's stygian justice; they are transformed. The Twisting warps and wrenches their bodies beyond all recognition, and they become . . .

THE ABOMINATIONS

Ladies? Gentlemen? It's time our new friend saw the creatures behind our ring of curtains. It is time to behold the squirming flesh which weeps at the bottom of the pit.

Tindal calls these wretched creatures the "freaks of the freaks, the monsters of the monsters." Don't worry, Stranger, these aberrations of nature are quite secure in their lock-boxes. The Abominations can't escape unless some poor fool opens their cages. For now, try to tear your eyes away from the horrors surrounding you and observe the mass of roiling, noisome flesh filling the bottom of this dank pit. This creature is a true horror, is it not? So malformed, so shapeless, one would never even know that it was originally human.

Oh, yes, Stranger, these Abominations displayed in the cages around you were also once all as human as you or I. That abhorrent mound of living despair at the bottom of this pit was the first of their kind to change; the first of Isolde's most horrid victims. I knew him, indirectly, for he was once a friend of my anonymous ally.

Allow me to explain how he attained this dreadful state. It was shortly after the Grand Conjunction—you might know it better as the Great Upheaval—that my nameless ally first learned of Isolde's foul presence. To his horror, he also discovered that she was recruiting outcast Vistani to serve her wicked ends. He sought to sever this unholy compact before it made Isolde an even more formidible menace. My ally recruited a champion, and this champion slew Arabela, the first of the Skurra. Sadly, the champion failed to accomplish his task before Arabela had created the masks of creeping paint that Isolde's minions have used ever since to recruit more of their fallen kind.

Even more deplorable, my ally's champion was captured by Isolde and suffered her wrath. Death would have been far too kind a punishment for her to mete out. This horror incarnate you see below, this flesh gone mad, is the price that the champion paid for his valor. He became the first of the Abominations, but as you will soon see, he was hardly the last.

The Hall of Horrors is now home to six Abominations, each one more hideous and inhuman than the other. The remaining five are secured in the lock-boxes now, behind the ring of curtains all around you. I can only pray that their minds have been destroyed; I cannot bear to contemplate the suffering these poor souls must endure if they remain aware that they are forever trapped within such repulsive, inhuman flesh. Sadly, I fear that if any shred of thought does remain, it is the memory of what they once were, and the knowledge of what they are now. Undoubtedly Isolde would consider that torture far too exquisite to forgo.

Over the years, six individuals have betrayed the Carnival and suffered Isolde's wrath. I knew two of them before their fall, and I do not vouch for their character. Take that hunched monstrosity there—the one with the three interlocking jaws and the boneless legs. I found him to be a particularly objectionable individual, and perhaps when he passes to his eternal judgment, he might even deserve damnation. But he's not dead, and that's the point. Isolde has chosen to bring the damnation of the afterlife to the mortal realm. She is creating a living hell, and you are standing in its blackened heart.

For now, Isolde has restrained herself to completely ruining the bodies only of those who have offended her. *Naturally.* If she were to simply start dissolving people at her whim, she would risk losing her throng of faithful, more than sixty servants strong. But the desire is there, I assure you. We are slowly being Twisted by the same force which created these hideous monsters. Look closely at the Abominations, Stranger; observe their seeping flesh. As you examine them, let this thought play in your mind. Unless Isolde is destroyed, unless some hero steps forward to do what must be done, then when you look upon the Abominations, you look upon your own future.

Your education is now complete. The lecture is over, and it's time for a test. I take grave risk in broaching this topic with you, Stranger, but I believe I can trust you. It's time for us to reveal . . .

PACALI'S SCHEME AGAINST ISOLDE

Six times have people sought to destroy the Carnival. Six times have they failed and been cast into the pit of despair. And if we fail in our righteous task, we too shall be thrown into the pit, transformed into monsters and reviled by freaks. Now I hope you understand why we must act with absolute secrecy, and why we have no room for error. Why some . . . sacrifices may be necessary to reach our goals.

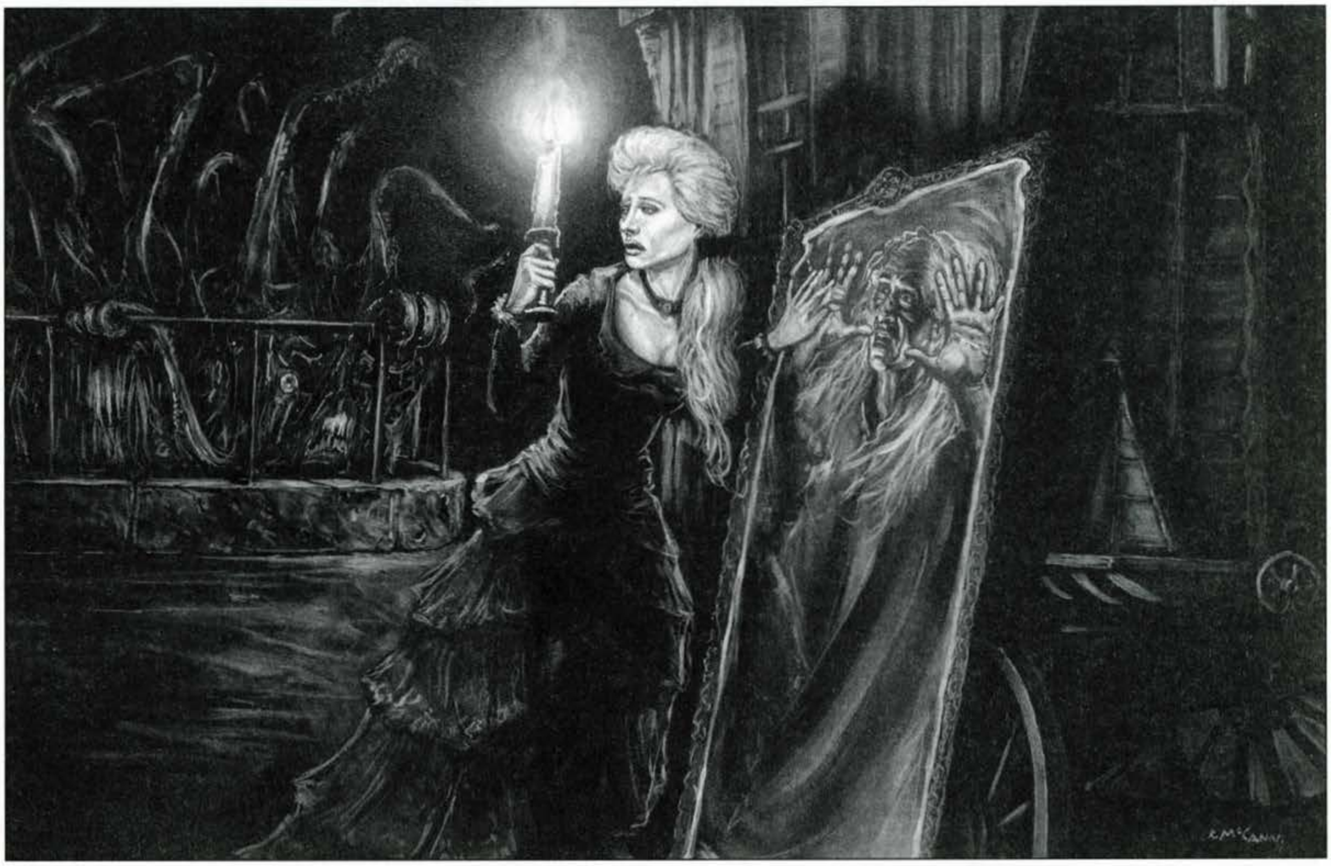
To date, neither I nor my present allies have acted openly against Isolde, nor have we broken Carnival Law in any way. We are not yet ready to strike against Isolde, but we will be, soon. Our plan is already in motion. I'd like you to join us in the completion of that plan.

Yes, I know what you must be thinking. I've dispelled your ignorance concerning the true nature of the saintly Isolde. I have shown you that she is a fiend, an immortal demon capable of turning healthy men into Abominations with a thought. And to battle her limitless evil, I've presented you with a mere half a dozen freaks, some of whom have never held a sword. To add to the daunting nature of our task, we do not even know Isolde's true name.

Do not worry, Stranger. One of the constants of the Carnival is that nothing is as it seems. Again I turn to *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends.* That tome does not simply offer methods of identifying the fiends which walk among us; it illustrates how we can destroy them as well. Van Richten details the construction of a device he calls the *Mystick Cage.* It is a ring of power which can be used to trap a fiend, and in that trap, destroy it. Look around you, Stranger; do you not see a ring within your view? Such as the ring of wagons which now surround you?

My anonymous ally has been most helpful. Together, we are constructing a *Mystick Cage,* and piece by piece, we are installing it into the wagons you see before you. Every wagon here already has part of the Cage built into its very structure. When construction is complete, we can simply slip the missing pieces of the *Mystick Cage* into place; we will be able to assemble our trap faster than the gypsies can pack a wagon! The display pit in the center; that is where Isolde will be trapped. When I have recruited enough champions, she will be surrounded by warriors dedicated to her destruction.

Observe Isolde's distaste for the laws of others, which has bled into her Carnival. Observe the formless, shifting nature of the Twisting. All this indicates that she is a creature of chaos. I now possess designs for magic circles of protection against her demonic power. Isolde's reign of terror is coming to an end. Soon, the world will be rid of her corruption forever!



The Abominations

Abominations are the nearly mindless victims of Isolde's wrath, distorted beyond all recognition. Their existence is filled with nothing but misery and pain. Their shattered minds retain only torturous memories of their crimes and two dueling desires: a lust for vengeance, and the wish to die so that their suffering might finally end.

Pacali believes Isolde shapes the Abominations herself; the Skurra believe she simply withdraws her protection from the ravages of the Twisting. The latter is closer to the truth, but the result is no less terrible. Among humans, symmetry is beauty. The Abominations have grossly asymmetrical bodies with drooping, twitching limbs. Their appendages seem to have been collected from any number of incongruous creatures, thrown together at random, and then melted together.

Isolde can transform victims into Abominations at will, with only a moment's thought. The ensuing transformation lasts a full turn and requires all witnesses to make a horror check. To date, the Mistress of the Carnival has reserved this most dire of punishments for six humans who have brought death to her domain. The Skurra have fashioned six lock-boxes to contain and transport them. However, since each lock-box is divided in half, it would seem that the Skurra have prepared for a time in which the Carnival claims more than six of these horrors.

Although the Abominations are dangerous and despised by the Troupers and Skurra alike, they too are protected by Carny Law. *Harming or killing an Abomination is absolutely forbidden, except in cases of self-defense.* Pacali has a simple explanation: The Abominations must be kept alive to savor their punishment for as long as is inhumanly possible.

Molding a Monster: No two Abominations are exactly the same. Their bodies represent what happens when Isolde permits the unfiltered chaos of the Twisting to run its course. To "flesh out" the six existing Abominations (or create new ones in your campaign), determine their combat statistics randomly, using the statistics below. Hit Dice determine hit points and THAC0.

Abomination (6): AC 1d4; MV 1d6+3; HD 1d4+6; hp varies; THAC0 varies; #AT 1d4; Dmg special; SA varies; SD regeneration; immune to polymorph & mind controlling spells; SZ M–L (6'–7' long); ML fearless (20); Int semi (2–4); AL CE; XP varies.

An Abomination can make one to four attacks per round. Roll 1d4 for each creature; the number of attacks that a given creature can make remains constant thereafter. Each attack represents an "extra" body part that the Abomination can fling, flop, or otherwise target at a foe.

Consult Table 2 to determine the precise nature of each attack. If you get the same result twice, it simply means the Abomination has two of those body parts. Once the attack modes have been determined, feel free to "enhance" the appearance of each Abomination with any number of mismatched eyes and misshapen, useless limbs and growths.

Note that all Abominations regenerate 1 hp per round; unless the body is completely destroyed by fire or acid, this regeneration continues even past 0 hp.

Abominations are immune to all polymorph spells; no magic short of a *wish* can rescue an Abomination from its wretched, shifting body. Abominations are also immune to all mind-controlling spells. Furthermore, any spellcaster making mental contact with an Abomination's warped mind must make an immediate madness check.

Abominations feel little more than mindless rage. Normally, they attack anything that gets close enough for them to lash out. However, Pacali has learned that he has a very slight bit of influence upon them. He knows that the Abominations' ruined minds still cling to their burning hatred for Isolde. Thus, Pacali has trained the Abominations to seek out Isolde, fearlessly attacking anything that crosses their paths until they find her.

TABLE 2: Abomination Attacks

d8 Roll	Attack Form
1	Gaping Maw
2	Tentacles
3	Clawed Arm
4	Pincer
5	Kicking Leg
6	Bloodsucking Mouth
7	Curving Hook
8	Bony Club

Table Results

Gaping Maw: The Abomination has a set of mismatched jaws, filled with oversized and crooked teeth. The creature's bite causes 1d8 points of damage. Once per turn, it can howl with such intense despair that all opponents within 30 feet must make a saving throw vs. spell; those who fail must refrain from attacking that Abomination for 1d4 rounds, because they feel overwhelming pity for the wretched beast.

Tentacles: The Abomination sprouts a cluster of tentacles, with which it can lash out, causing 1d4 points of damage. On a natural attack roll of 19 or 20, the tentacles can wrap around a victim's throat, slowly causing him to suffocate. (See the "Holding Your Breath" rules in the *Player's Handbook.*) The Abomination will only release its victim when it has lost one quarter of its total hit points. Roll an extra 1d4 if you determine an Abomination has tentacles. On a 1, the tentacles end in tiny, fanged jaws that an inflict an extra point of damage each round. On a 4, each tentacle ends in a lidless, bloodshot eye.

Clawed Arm: The Abomination's hand looks almost human, except for the talons. Its slashing attack inflicts 1d6 points of damage. The creature also can use its hand to manipulate tools and weapons, assuming someone is foolish enough to provide such things.

Pincer: The Abomination can use its pincer to snap at foes, causing up to 1d8 points of damage. If the creature wishes, the pincer can grip and hold a target (with a successful attack). As long as a victim is caught in the pincer, however, the Abomination can no longer use that limb to attack, but *other* assaults on a pinned victim are made with a +2 attack bonus.

Kicking Leg: This muscular leg kicks hard, causing 1d6 points of damage. In addition, the creature can jump 10 feet forward or straight up.

Bloodsucking Mouth: The mouth resembles a lamprey's sucker. With a successful attack, the mouth attaches to a victim, "sucking away" 1d4 hit points per round. The Abomination won't release its hold until it loses a quarter of its total hit points.

Curving Hook: The Abomination wields a curving, hooklike talon at the end of a multi-jointed limb. The creature can cause 1d6 points of damage with each slashing attack. In addition, the creature can use the hook like a piton to climb vertical surfaces.

Bony Club: One of the Abomination's limbs ends in a solid mass of bone. The creature can wield it like a club, inflicting 1d8 points of damage per attack.

Capturing Fiends

In his work, Van Richten introduces the concept that fiends who leave their native planes of existence have their life-force tied to a specific object. These "phylactaries" can take virtually any form, and function in a fashion similar to those possessed by liches, as described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL tome.* If the fiends' enemies acquire its phylactary, they have great power over the creature, for if the phylactery is destroyed, the fiend's evil soul disperses. (Otherwise, when you "kill" the fiend, its soul simply takes refuge in the phylactary.) Further, as mentioned by Professor Pacali, the phylactary is a key component in constructing an effective *Mystick Cage.*

Van Richten's work describes two different rituals for capturing fiends within a *Mystick Cage.* Each rite is the equivalent of a 6th-level spell, and thus requires either an 11th-level priest or 12th-level wizard to cast. In either case, the ritual takes 30 minutes to perform, and during this time the fiend can leave the *Mystick Cage* that has been prepared for it at will. In other words, a group of characters must be able to stand against an immensely powerful supernatural being for half an hour if they are to successfully imprison and destroy it.

To make the successful completion of the *Mystick Cage* ritual an even more difficult task, it is powered by the life-force of those brave souls who take part in it. If their number should drop below four through violence or guile on the part of the creature they are trying to contain, the ritual fails. Van Richten also mentions various magical circles useful in confining fiends, but he deems them less effective than the *Mystick Cage.*

Full rules governing the *Mystick Cage* and magical circles can be found in *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends* and *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Vol. III.*

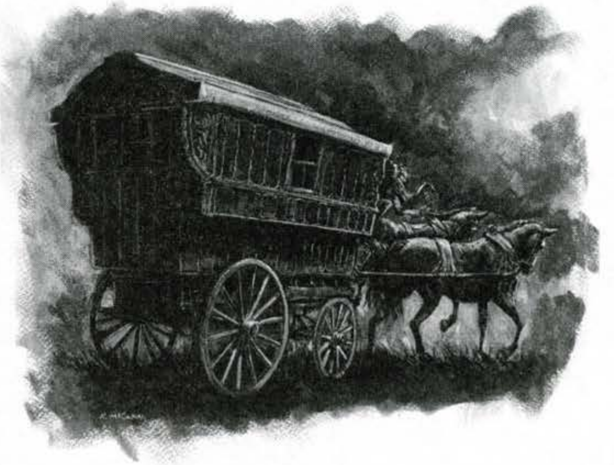
But for that to happen, I will need assistance. My problem is two-fold; I must find a way to trap Isolde within the Cage, and I must recruit those who are powerful enough to destroy her once she is trapped. And you, my friend, can help.

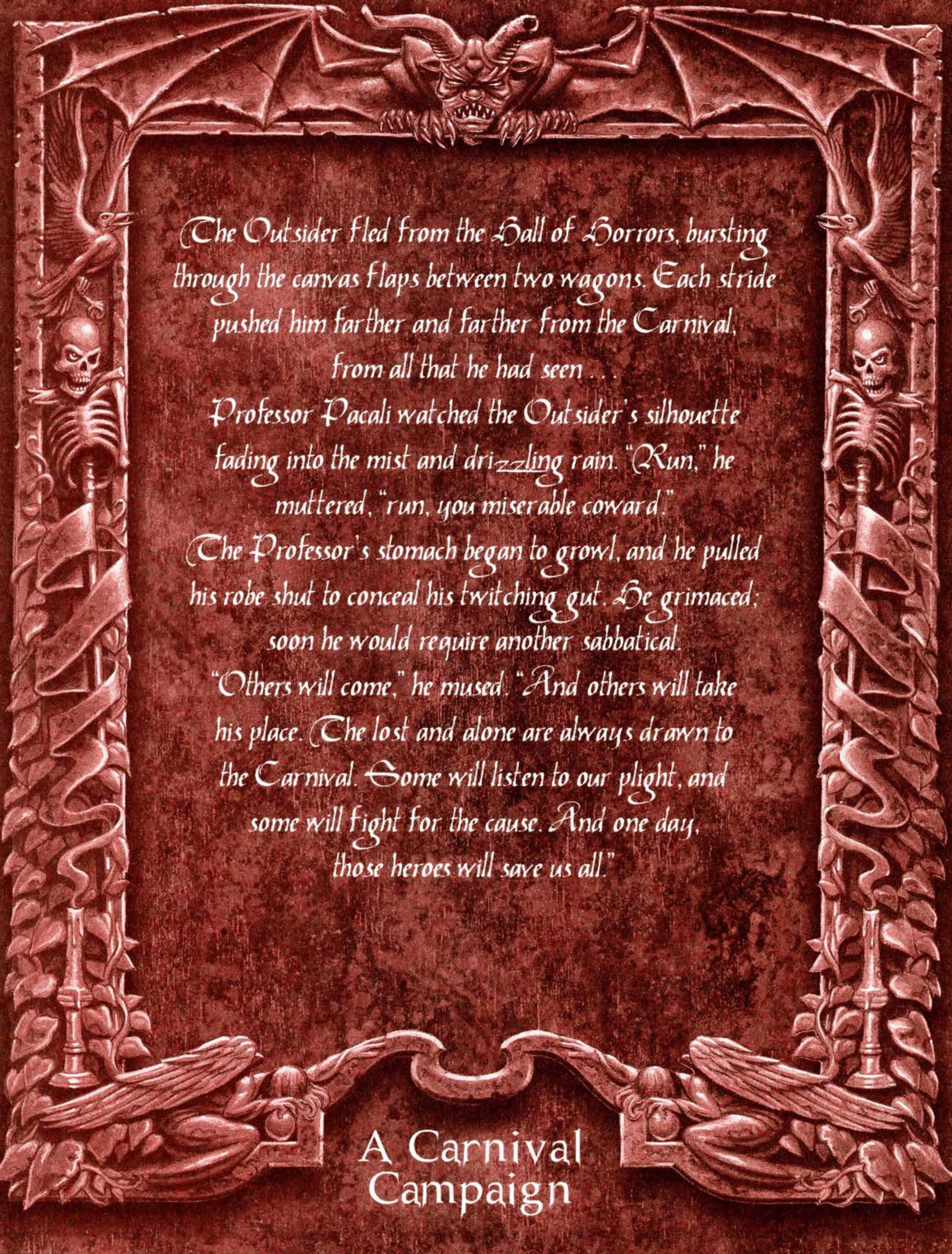
If the *Mystick Cage* is to restrain Isolde, we must discover her true name, or we must obtain her phylactery—a vessel that contains her very essence. I hold little hope for acquiring the former, but the latter offers intriguing possibilities. Note that curved beam holding the iron chandelier above us; those candles will be replaced by a metal box. That box will hold Isolde's phylactery. He who holds the phylactery of a fiend has power over that fiend, and I theorize that Isolde's phylactery must be in one of only two places.

I hold it as probable that Isolde's phylactery is that strange, opalescent sword she carries. I have never seen its like. Yes, I've seen a sword hilt crafted from mother-of-pearl before, but the blade? I think not. No, the blade is quite unusual, its magical might worthy of note. And there is other evidence as well: Isolde is never seen without that sword at her side.

While the chance is remote, of course, I could be mistaken. But if the sword is not our goal, then Isolde must keep her phylactery hidden within her wagon. After all, no member of the Carnival—not Tindal, nor Fortuna, nor even Hermos himself—has ever seen the inside of that wagon. Do you not wonder what she is hiding?

As for the problem of champions to battle her, you look capable of handling yourself. So what shall it be, my friend? Are you willing to risk life, limb, and even your very soul to purge the world of this insidious fiend? Have I judged you correctly? Are you up to this challenge? Are you worthy of the title of hero?





The Outsider fled from the Hall of Horrors, bursting through the canvas flaps between two wagons. Each stride pushed him farther and farther from the Carnival, from all that he had seen . . .

Professor Pacali watched the Outsider's silhouette fading into the mist and drizzling rain. "Run," he muttered, "run, you miserable coward."

The Professor's stomach began to growl, and he pulled his robe shut to conceal his twitching gut. He grimaced; soon he would require another sabbatical.

"Others will come," he mused. "And others will take his place. The lost and alone are always drawn to the Carnival. Some will listen to our plight, and some will fight for the cause. And one day, those heroes will save us all."

A Carnival Campaign

> *Mere puppets they, who come and go*
> *At bidding of vast formless things*
> *That shift the scenery to and fro . . .*
>
> **—Edgar Allen Poe**
> **The Conqueror Worm (1843)**

ADVENTURE SCENARIOS

This section outlines five adventures. The scenarios represent a series of intermittent meetings with the Carnival, which you can weave into an existing campaign. Together, these little tales create a "subplot" that unfolds over time, building a relationship between the heroes and the Troupers, and perhaps even with Isolde herself.

By the time these scenarios have been played out, many of Isolde's deepest secrets will be laid bare. (See the summary on page 64.) However, Isolde never reveals *all* her secrets, and as DM, should you avoid giving away every mystery concerning the Carnival's mistress and her followers. For best effect, the Carnival should always retain some of its dark mystique and inherent contradictions. Heroes who come to the Carnival seeking monsters will surely find them, but those seeking allies will find them too. Often it can be hard to tell the difference. The preceding chapters have presented several viewpoints on the Carnival, but ultimately, you are the only legitimate source of the "real truth"; the Carnival is whatever you wish it to be.

The Night People

Recommended for levels 1 to 3. This adventure introduces heroes to the Carnival and kicks off a campaign.

Background: The plot takes place in a small village—preferably a hero's "home." Every year for the last few decades, a tribe of very pale little bandits has pestered this place. They strike at night, stealing animals from outlying farms for a week or two, and then move on. Locals call these creatures the Night People.

This year, something's new: The bandits are nastier, and they're not leaving. Moreover, Carnival flyers have mysteriously appeared, posted on some homes and businesses. Paranoia is growing. Some villagers believe the flyers mark those who are secretly in league with the Night People. The worst target of their suspicion is Blasse, a 16-year-old albino girl who works at the inn.

Blasse was abandoned at the inn as an infant. The innkeep and his wife let her stay, raising her to be a good maid. She is very shy and withdrawn, even a little "touched," perhaps. Village boys tease her, while others simply keep their distance; no one truly understands the condition that makes her hair white, her skin ghostly, and her eyes pink. The girl rarely leaves her home.

For years, some folk who've glimpsed the little white Night People have suggested that Blasse is one of their kind (though decidedly taller). When the innkeep's wife found a flyer in Blasse's room, even she grew fearful.

Revelations: The "Night People" are bakhna rakhna, a race of thieving albino goblins. What they lack in courage, they make up for with steath and basic cunning. Blasse has no connection to them, but she *is* the cause of their angry raids. A goblin spied her this year, and now all of them believe that one of their own kind has been enslaved.

The phantom flyers have no direct link to the Night People; the goblins don't even know they exist. The flyers simply herald the coming of the Carnival.

Complications: On the day Blasse's flyer is discovered, heroes awake to find a flyer in *their* room too. Blasse cannot explain how she got the flyer. Fear grips the town.

The heroes overhear some villagers planning to lynch Blasse at dawn (they fear her "power" is stronger at night). If the heroes urge Blasse to flee, she refuses, whispering that "her suitor" will rescue her. She won't describe him, though. (During her life, only one person has made Blasse feel wanted; she secretly met a mysterious gentleman caller.) If the heroes try to "kidnap" the girl, they meet the goblins, who have plans of their own.

Quick-minded heroes may try to capture some Night People, intending to use them to prove Blasse's innocence. Unfortunately, the goblins *do* consider Blasse to be one of them, mistaking her height for greatness. They want Blasse as their queen, and intend to "rescue" her. Moreover, capturing a goblin is challenging; Night People flee from conflict and hide very well. To solve this problem, a female hero could act as bait, disguising herself as Blasse; a douse of flour would do. Crafty heroes also might use Carnival flyers to entrance the creatures.

Resolution: When dawn comes, a mob of thirty-some villagers moves into action, determined to lynch Blasse. If she's home, her guardians hand her over without a struggle. The villagers are beyond reason and drag the girl to a tree, where they slip a rope around her neck. (If the heroes have spent the night hunting, they arrive just in time to see this.) Saving Blasse is not easy; the heroes should be hard-pressed to deal with an entire mob (some of whom may be friends or family). The likely outcome: some heroes will be overwhelmed, while the best fighters manage to reach Blasse just as the rope goes taut and she jerks into the air, twisting and writhing. A hero might be able to get under her feet to support her.

Just then, a single blade spins out of nowhere and slices cleanly through the rope. Blasse drops to the ground, coughing and gasping. A frightened murmuring begins as people turn to peer in the direction from which the blade was thrown. All eyes fall on a new trio of strangers, who arrive with the dawning sun.

Isolde stands flanked by two men, her eyes seething with rage. A glowing sword hangs at her side, and the two men (the Blade Brothers) twirl throwing knives in their hands. Their faces are white with skull-like designs.

Isolde draws her sword and strides forward. When she reaches Blassse, she holds out her hand, simply saying, "This is no longer your home. I can give you a new one."

Blasse looks frightened, but remarkably, she takes Isolde's hand and the pair begins to leave. Passing the heroes, Isolde pauses. If it's appropriate, she gives the heroes a nod of appreciation and a Blade Brother motions for them to follow (assuming you wish it). If the heroes do not follow immediately, or if they failed to help Blasse, they will not find the Carnival this time. Isolde and her companions slip into the woods, and when the heroes track them, the Carnival already will have moved on.

Bakhna rakhna (20): AC 7; MV 6; HD 1; hp 5; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (stick); SA poison; SD stealth, immune to poison; SW sunlight; SZ S (3′ tall); ML average (10); Int low (6); AL NE; XP 175.

Notes: Each bakhna rakhna carries 1d6 sharpened, poison-coated sticks that can be wielded like daggers or fired from small bows. Struck targets must save vs. poison with a –3 penalty or be paralyzed for 1d4 turns. When exposed to light, a bakhna rakhna must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or fall into fits for 1d4 turns. Bakhna rakhna can Hide in Shadows and Move Silently as thieves with 70% ability. Each can also cast passwall four times a day, and can cast *silence, 15′ radius* twice a day.

Aftermath: Blasse is a useful character; if the heroes have a series of encounters with the Carnival, they can observe how she slowly and subtly becomes a Trouper.

The Vampiress, Amelia, takes Blasse under her wing and invents a persona: "The Ghost Girl." Dressed in veils of whisper-thin black silk to emphasize her spectral appearance, Blasse shares the stage with Amelia for a time, and they become friends. Blasse never speaks of the gentleman caller, though she still yearns for him and hopes that one day he will find her.

When the Twisting first takes hold, blotches appear on Blasse's skin. Blasse is horrified and Professor Pacali reveals the "truth"; he makes her believe that she and all the other Troupers are cursed by Isolde.

Blasse doesn't understand Pacali's complex mystical theories surrounding the "fiend" Isolde, but she begins to trust him, and follows wherever he leads. She hopes to regain the appearance her "suitor" had found so alluring.

As time passes, Blasse's body slowly becomes transparent. Soon she can change her skin tone and hair color to blend into the background, like a chameleon. When the Twisting completes its work (before the final adventure), she will have a 90% chance of going undetected, provided she remains perfectly still.

Blasse, 0-level human female: AC 10; MV 12; hp 3; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA surprise; SD camouflage; SZ M; ML steady (11); Str 9, Dex 11, Con 10, Int 11, Wis 12, Cha 7; AL N.

Notes: Because she's albino, Blasse suffers a –1 penalty to all die rolls while exposed to bright lights. She remains a timid character, unlikely to behave aggressively.

All Part of the Show!

Recommended for levels 1 to 3. Features "Wood'n-Head"; see Chapter One for story details.

Background: In a village surrounded by deep, wild forest, the heroes meet Garmen, a trapper with a bizarre story. Early that morning, he discovered a green, gangly forearm in one of his bear traps. The arm ended in a clawed hand. When the bizarre appendage began to writhe and twitch, he fled. When he mustered the courage to look again, the trap stood open, and it was empty.

The villagers laugh at this crazy tale—until an alchemist called Dyak announces that a gangly green creature killed his partner, Munter, in the woods. Dyak asks the heroes to track and kill "the lurker," offering them 100 gp each.

Revelations: Dyak is lying. His partner isn't dead—thanks to a magical experiment, he has become the creature that lost its arm. And that creature still lives.

The Trouper called Woodn'-Head owns some alchemy notes describing a regenerative potion. Only he has the complete notes, but Dyak and Munter managed to purchase a partial copy from a third party and started brewing. Neither man would drink the results themselves; then Dyak secretly "spiked" Munter's food.

When nothing terrible seemed to happen, Dyak confessed his actions. Shocked but curious, Munter tested his condition: He cut his palm. The wound swiftly healed, but the flesh became mottled and rubbery. Munter watched helplessly as this new, alien flesh began to spread up his arm. As he fled into the woods, half mad with fear, his entire arm changed, becoming long, green, and spindly. Munter tried to tear off the arm in a bear trap, but the severed limb pursued him and reattached itself.

Now Munter's transformation is nearly complete; he's becoming a troll. His sanity is fading. With each day, his thoughts become more limited, focusing only on matters of hunger and revenge. Meanwhile, Dyak hopes the heroes will kill Munter before Munter kills *him.*

Complications: After a day or two on the hunt, the heroes have discovered animal carcasses, but no "lurker." In the village, the phantom flyers appear, and then the Carnival itself arrives. Dyak lies, claiming that he has seen the lurker in a flyer, beside a man with a spike through his head. He urges the heroes to help him investigate the Carnival. (In truth, he has heard of the legendary Wood'n-Head, and he hopes to steal the original elixir formula.)

Naturally, the heroes catch Wood'n-Head's act. Tindal is the barker, and the Brute assists. When Tindal asks for a "volunteer" who can handle a sword, Dyak urges a hero to answer (offering money or making a "friendly wager" if necessary. Don't force the action, but if a hero doesn't step forward, the story is either over or needs adjustment.)

When the hero is onstage, Tindal explains that he or she must drive the sword through Wood'n-Head's skull while the Trouper's head lies on a block, literally pinning him. The person who can subsequently "pull the sword from the stump" will be admitted free to the Hall of Horrors—and it will only cost a copper to try!

As Tindal works the crowd, Dyak devises a crude yet cunning plan. He secretly quaffs an *unseen servant* potion, and when the sword descends (an automatic hit), Dyak's unseen servant shoves Wood'n-Head. The sword decapitates the Trouper, and the head goes rolling across the stage as his twitching body slumps to the floor. The audience shrieks. Tindal keeps calm, proclaiming, "Not to worry! It's part of the show! Let's hear it for Wood'n-Head!"

But it is *not* part of the show. As Tindal hustles the other Georges away, the Brute grabs the volunteer, and other Troupers swarm the heroes with daggers drawn. Isolde steps in, halting them with a simple "Wait" as she eyes the adventure party. If the heroes faced the Night People, she curtly adds, "I remember you."

Isolde picks up the decapitated head and asks it what happened. Shockingly, it answers, the lips silently working to form words. Isolde understands; Wood'n-Head exonerates the volunteer, but there's still a problem: he fears he cannot survive this injury. His body lies twitching and quivering, and the wound has sealed shut.

A Carny member suggests they cut him again and attempt a rejoining, but Isolde says this may kill him. Wood'n-Head reluctanty describes his notes to Isolde, who has a Trouper fetch them. Dyak is thrilled.

Wood'n-Head's helpers remove the alchemical notations from their secret compartment, and after some study (perhaps with help from a heroic mage), a potential remedy is deciphered. There's a hitch: the formula requires the blood of a regenerating creature, and Wood'n-Head's own plasma won't do. (Of course, no Trouper would ever suggest using the Abominations.)

To complicate matters, Woodn'Head's notes turn up missing. Troupers blame the heroes, but Isolde declares them innocent and says the heroes can go—or they can help track the wizard behind the *unseen servant*.

While searching the woods, the heroes find Dyak in hiding. He has Wood'n-Head's notes, and the slightest intimidation prompts him to confess all. He offers to pay the heroes to help him just before Isolde appears. If the heroes do not volunteer the right information, a fear-filled Dyak proclaims that Munter could provide the blood needed to save Wood'n-Head. Dyak is taken captive. Isolde promises judgment at the end of the affair.

Resolution: The heroes have 48 hours to capture Munter before Wood'n-Head dies (according to a Skurra's proclamation). The heroes have had no luck tracking him so far, but Munter comes to those who wait. He craves Dyak's blood and hunts him down. If the heroes do find the lurker's trail, they discover it leads to the Carnival!

The party catches up with Munter just as Munter finds Dyak. If the heroes protect Dyak, Isolde arrives just moments after they have slain or subdued the "troll."

If the heroes do nothing, the Trouper guarding Dyak turns a blind eye to Munter's attack. After that, Munter runs amok in the camp until Isolde puts him in a lock-box.

Freshly dead or still alive, Munter holds the key to saving Wood'n Head (a mere drop of his blood). As for the heroes, Isolde invites them to travel with the Carnival if they wish. Dyak mysteriously disappears.

Dyak, human male, W5 (eremite): AC 10; MV 12; hp 16; THAC0 19; #AT 1; Dmg by weapon; SA spells; SD spells; SZ M (5'10"); ML steady (12); Str 10, Dex 12, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 9, Cha 11; AL NE.

Spells (prepared potions) (4/2/1): armor, burning hands, spider climb, unseen servant; strength, locate object; wraithform.

Munter (troll): AC 4; MV 12; HD 6+6; hp 45; THAC0 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d4+4/1d4+4/1d8+4 or by weapon +8; SA potions; SD regeneration; SZ L (9'); ML steady (11); Int average (10); AL CN; XP 1,400.

Notes: Starting three rounds after suffering damage, Munter regenerates 3 hp per round until healed. Only damage inflicted by fire or acid damage does not regenerate. An attacker can sever Munter's limbs with a natural 20 attack roll when using an edged weapon; severed limbs can still attack. Munter also carries a sack holding six vials, each of which contains an unstable alchemical compound. If a vial is smashed, the contents burn like Greek fire.

Meeting Mister ?

Recommended for levels 3 to 5. Features Mister ?; see Chapter One for details.

Background: This adventure works best if the heroes know the Troupers. The Carnival sets up camp near a city, and after a successful day of business, moves on. At the next stop, a problem becomes evident: Mister ? is gone, and a naked male amnesiac is tied up in his vardo.

Troupers ask the heroes to go back to the city with the amnesiac and set things right, sending a Skurra or two along as drivers and assistants. (If the heroes aren't with the Carnival, they may simply encounter the Skurra in the city, who hope to switch the amnesiac for Mister ?.)

Revelations: Discovering the identity of the amnesiac won't be hard; back in the city, everyone recognizes him as Reinold Ardezie, captain of the guard!

Complications: Mister ? has replaced Ardezie, fooling everyone, including Ardezie's wife and children, and Mister ? *himself.* He finds the notion that he is not Ardezie utter insanity. Kidnapping the false Reinold would be difficult; Ardezie is always accompanied by 2d4 city militia, and the number doubles if Mister ? has reason to fear.

Ultimately, this scenario comes down to diplomacy and timing. The heroes must prove to Mister ? that he is not Ardezie—*before* the golem starts to lose his grip on Reinold's memories and becomes paranoid. In that state, he'll set the guard against the heroes and try to capture the real Ardenzie to steal his memories again.

Resolution: This adventure could be resolved without combat, or the heroes could find themselves hunted by Ardezie's guardsmen. Note that a well-timed *burning hands* spell may reveal who the false Reinhold is.

Reinhold Ardezie, human male, F6: AC 7 (studded leather); MV 12; hp 45; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 (long sword); SZ M (6′); ML elite (14); Str 14, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 12, Wis 11, Cha 13; AL LN.

The Lovely Prisoner

Recommended for levels 4 to 6. Features "The Snake Mistress"; see Chapter One.

Background: In Sithicus, the heroes meet a desperate elven mage called Sarlandril. The mage describes Isolde, "a dangerous and evil entity" who rules a wandering carnival. He claims that he was foolish enough to oppose her, and as punishment, Isolde abducted his only daughter, the "beautiful and innocent" Silessa. Now Isolde and her minions keep the elfmaid prisoner, forcing this "poor, sweet child" to exhibit herself as a freak.

Sarlandril is desperate to recover his daughter, and offers the heroes up to 500 gp each to perform a rescue. He tried once himself; he failed miserably, but learned his daughter has been brainwashed and may resist a rescue. He gives the heroes a *dispel magic* scroll and this instruction: if Silessa refuses to go with them, they can use the scroll to shatter any mind-twisting in effect. *(Note: If the heroes know Silessa, see "Alternate Setup" below.")*

Revelations: Sarlandril is lying. As revealed in Chapter One, Silessa is the mage's polymorphed pseudo-familiar. Sarlandril has never stopped lusting after her. He keeps tabs on Silessa with the aid of the spy Tindafalus (see Chapter Three), who has warned Sarlandril that directly opposing Isolde would be suicidal.

The *dispel magic* scroll is exactly that. After sending many hapless teams to attempt a "rescue," Sarlandril's patience is worn. If he cannot recover the Snake Mistress this time, he'll satisfy himself with preventing everyone else from enjoying her. The simple scroll cannot break the bond between the pair, but it will shatter the polymorph that keeps beautiful Silessa from becoming a lowly asp.

Thanks to Tindafulus, Sarlandril knows where the Carnival stopped last. Whether it's still there is up to the Dungeon Master.

Complications: Devising a rescue plan is filled with challenges—not the least of which Silessa's total lack of cooperation. If she has been brainwashed, it was thorough: no one who watches her perform sees an "innocent child."

Silessa is cagey; she suspects the heroes' true master. If they kidnap her, they risk the fury of the Carnival, particularly if they use the *dispel magic* scroll. Through sleuthing and guile, the heroes can learn the truth of the situation from Silessa, or from a Trouper, and may find themselves hunting Sarlandril along with the Carny.

Alternate Setup: If the heroes are traveling with the Carnival, Sarlandril hires another party to kidnap Silessa. At some point, an NPC uses the scroll. Once Silessa is an asp, all hell breaks loose and the would-be rescuers flee. The heroes must track them. When successful, they learn the NPCs' predicament; their greatest crime was stupidity (for trusting Sarlandril). The heroes find themselves racing the denizens of the Carnival to hunt down the mage. Tindal knows that killing Sarlandril would destroy Silessa; perhaps the heroes will discover this before it's too late.

Resolution: The final encounter takes place in Sithicus, where Sarlandril, a despicable mage, attempts to destroy the heroes. If the Serpent Mistress is present, a battle with Sarlandril could prove difficult; regardless of her form, Silessa has "vampiric regeneration" (see below). If the heroes can conjure up a creative way to remove Sarlandril as a threat without killing him, let them play it out. But if the heroes are scratching their heads or plan to massacre the mage, the Carnival catches up.

Isolde handles Sarlandril personally—and in private. He survives, but lacks arms and legs when she has finished. Any NPCs who did his bidding suffer this fate: the Illuminated Man saddles them with unbound night terrors.

Even if Silessa has been turned into an asp, Isolde can eventually set matters right. She takes the serpent into her vardo. An hour later, Silessa is back with the troupe as the Snake Mistress. From this point on, whenever she is angered, her pupils become slits like those of a snake.

Sarlandril, elf male, W8: AC 5 (bracers of defense); MV 12; hp 22; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (dagger); SA spells; SD spells, 90% immunity to *sleep* & *charm* spells; SZ M (5′3″); ML steady (11); Str 12, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 17, Wis 11, Cha 14; AL LE.

Memorized Spells (4/3/3/2): detect magic, magic missile (×2), shield; bind, invisibility, whispering wind; haste, flame arrow, nondetection; polymorph other, stoneskin.

Silessa (pseudo-familiar): AC 5; MV 15; HD 3+1; hp 18; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d3; SA Type E poison; SD +2 to hit, vampiric regeneration; SZ T (2′ long); ML steady (11); Int high (13); AL NE.

Notes: In her master's immediate presence, Silessa can regenerate any damage she or Sarlandril suffer. Starting in the round this power is activated, all wounded beings within 30′ lose 2 hp. Lost hp are divided evenly between Sarlandril and Silessa until both are restored to full health. Her eyes glow red while this occurs. In elven form, Silessa uses her vampiric talent subconsciously.

The Curtain Falls

Recommended for heroes of levels 6 to 9 who are well acquainted with the Carnival. Features Professor Pacali and his Pickled Punks; see Chapter Three for details.

Background: While traveling independently, the heroes receive a written invitation to visit Pacali at his humble home in Darkon's Boglands. The heroes should have met the professor, but they should *not* know of his secret scheme against Isolde; that's a matter for this adventure.

Revelations: Pacali has finally completed the *Mystick Cage.* Now he needs champions to wage the final battle.

Complications in Darkon: Pacali's Boglands home is a neglected, ramshackle wooden house. In the foyer, a freshly "born" Pickled Punk floats in a jar. Pacali claims he has just purchased this new Punk, and that he must return to the Carnival tomorrow; a Skurra wagon will escort him.

The professor explains his theories on fiends and uses every manipulative trick he knows to get the heroes to join his crusade. (He might even show *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends* to them.) If the heroes like Blasse, Pacali tells how the Twisting has affected her in the worst possible terms. Ultimately, Pacali insists, if the heroes want the Carny folk to survive, they must help him defeat Isolde.

If the heroes refuse to play into Pacali's paranoia, he seems to accept this, but still offers to let the PCs stay overnight. He intends to let his "newborn" in the foyer take care of the heroes. An hour before dawn, while the heroes are still sleeping in a guestroom, Pacali pulls the alcohol-soaked Punk from its jar and leaves it slumped against the party's door. As the Punk revives, Pacali packs his bags and steps outside to wait for his Skurra escort.

The Pickled Punk swiftly tries to reach the guests. If the door is unlocked and no one stands watch, it simply pushes the door open and slithers in, then clambers up and stares into 2d4 sleeping faces before dawn. If the heroes took precautions, the Punk must crawl up into the attic and lift a floorboard to peer down at 1d4 victims.

The heroes wake to find Pacali gone; a quick look outside shows a vardo vanishing into a fogbank. While the party deals with the unnatural behavior of some heroes (the Punk effect), they should discover the empty Punk bottle. They then hear the Punk skittering in the house's dark corners, and can track it down to conquer it.

If the heroes don't head for the Carnival to thwart Pacali, a Trouper they know shows up and asks for help, saying that no one believes his or her warnings that Pacali intends to destroy them all. Reward any reasonable plan to track the Carnival; heroes could hire Vistani guides, or look for flyers. It takes several days to reach the troupe, and by this time, Pacali's plan is coming to a head.

Back at the Carnival: If the heroes have joined Pacali, he introduces them to his allies (assuming they haven't already met) and outlines his plan: The heroes will help sow chaos in the Carnival. While Isolde is distracted, the Squid Woman will steal her sword. Then the heroes will run interference so the Squid Woman can get back to the *Mystick Cage,* so Pacali can place the sword, which he believes is Isolde's phylactary, at its heart. He promises his anonymous benefactor will be in personal attendance.

Pacali enhances the initial diversion by unleashing Pickled Punks. The heroes catch sight of them while attempting to keep Isolde from the Human Squid after the sword is stolen. Isolde tries to win the heroes to her side. If she fails, she allows the Twisting to seize them at a painfully rapid pace, then goes after the Squid Woman and stumbles into the *Mystick Cage.*

If the heroes are *not* part of Pacali's scheme, they arrive at this point. From a distance, the Carnival looks normal. The Vampiress is flying to and fro above the camp. As the heroes draw near, they hear screams and shouts, and a phantom flyer drifting across the ground mysteriously bursts into flame. The Vampiress lands before the heroes, weeping hysterically, and says Pacali and his friends have attacked Isolde. "Everyone is going mad!" she sobs, begging the heroes to help Isolde.

Since Isolde is not a fiend, as Pacali believes, the Mystick Cage "backfires." It causes the Twisting to run amok around Isolde, mutating people at random and driving them insane. Only heroes who make a successful saving throw save vs. death ray with a –5 penalty are immune to this effect. The heroes can hear Isolde's enraged shrieks from the Hall of Horrors. They will have to fight their way through insane Carnies and Georges . . . and 1d20+10 Pickled Punks.

The Stranger: After madness has reigned for a time, a dark stranger calmly walks through the frenzied crowd, causing men and women to fall over dead with the merest touch. Blasse appears, fleeing a rampaging Abomination, but she stops when she sees the man. He beckons to her, holding out his lethal hands and flashing an evil smile. Blasse is lost in rapturous joy. "Yes!" cries the stranger. "When we embrace, Isolde's defeat will be complete!"

If the heroes don't stop the girl, she goes to her lover and dies as they kiss. The stranger flees if attacked or if Isolde is rescued. This is her nemesis, the incubus.

Resolution: The heroes must free Isolde from the Mystick Cage or everyone around them will be destroyed by the uncontrolled Twisting (not to mention the rampaging Abominations and Pickled Punks). During the battle, Pacali's crew begins to turn against him, seeing the truth at last—that he is mad, mad, mad.

When the battle has ended and the dark stranger has fled, Isolde calls the Troupers together at the center of the ruined camp. With sorrow, she says that she will leave the Carnival, as her very presence has endangered her friends. She reveals her true nature (see page 64) and says she must hunt her foe alone. But as she walks toward the edge of the Carnival, the Troupers (and perhaps the heroes) move to block her, refusing to let her go. "We're family," Hermos says. "Everyone gets a second chance at the Carnival, Isolde. Especially you."

And so the Carnival continues to wander the domains, giving shelter to those who need it and delivering punishment to those who deserve it.

APPENDIX

The Final Truth About Isolde

Isolde

Mistress of the Carnival

Greater Eladrin (Ghaele), Chaotic Good

Armor Class	–5	Str	19
Movement	18	Dex	18
Level/Hit Dice	10+15	Con	19
Hit Points	75	Int	20
THAC0	11	Wis	16
No. of Attacks	1	Cha	18
Damage/Attack	By weapon +7		
Special Attacks	Positive energy, gaze		
Special Defenses	Struck only by cold iron or weapon of +3 or better enchantment		
Magic Resistance	40%		

Beyond the reality of mortals, other realms exist—places where philosophical concepts such as good and evil are manifested physically in beings of great power. The woman known as Isolde is one such being. Her people call themselves the Ghaele, but sages from other worlds would refer to her as a greater eladrin. Poets, on the other hand, might describe her as an angel—a guardian angel, perhaps, or an angel of vengeance.

Appearance: Isolde is a stunning beauty with pale skin, flowing black hair, and a dark, penetrating gaze. She looks like a human woman in her late twenties, but there is a slight hint of something alien her chiseled features, suggesting a touch of elf blood.

Isolde always wears dark clothing, favoring black and deep blues. Although she might don a gown when the Carnival does a command performance for a lord, she typically wears more masculine attire. Regardless, Islode always carries herself like a lady. She would never be mistaken for a noblewoman, however; whenever she is seen, a sword hangs on hip. The sword has an ornate, bejeweled hilt. Unsheathed, the blade glows brightly.

Background: In the boundless realm from which she hails, the being called Isolde was once known far and wide as a crusader. She often traveled into terrestrial worlds to bring freedom to the oppressed, hiding her identity behind a human or elven guise. At home, she was a favored and prized advisor to the lords of her people.

Isolde eventually found herself embroiled in a battle of wits against an incubus. The eladrin was trying to inspire a baroness to do good for her subjects; meanwhile the fiend was tempting the mortal toward foul and despicable acts in the name of lust. He bested Isolde and escaped before she could exact her revenge.

Since then, the eldarin has devoted herself to tracking this nameless incubus. She managed to corner him once, but fled, escaping to a plane of existence that had been declared off-limits to Isolde. The eladrin asked her masters to let her follow the fiend, and they agreed, knowing she might otherwise disobey. Her masters set forth two conditions, however: Isolde would be forever forced to remain in a human body, and she would spend the rest of her existence within that forbidden realm. Isolde agreed to their terms. And so, Isolde, an angel, came to be trapped within the dark confines of the Domains of Dread.

Nowhere in all the realities had Isolde seen so much evil, both petty and great. Although the incubus remains her main quarry, she now does what she can to alleviate the suffering of innocents and punish evildoers throughout Ravenloft She picks her battles carefully, though, having gleaned much about the darklords who rule here and how they came into being. Nonetheless, the dark powers have come to taunt Isolde the same way taunt the evil lords; they are the ones behind the phantom flyers that herald the Carnival's arrival, allowing her fiendish quarry to flee whenever she draws near.

Personality: Isolde is a kind, compassionate being. She deeply cares for innocent mortals who suffer at the hands of evil beings and petty tyrants. Her compassion, however, lies buried beneath a stern exterior, and her kind-hearted nature never sways her from her quest to destroy the incubus that brought her to Ravenloft.

Combat: Isolde wields a *longsword +4* that is charged with positive energy, causing it to inflict an extra 1d10 points of damage to any evil foe struck.

Eladrins normally have the ability to assume energy form, but Isolde has lost that and most other powers that are innate to her kind. Yet she has gained others in turn. Within her burns a soul that is pure chaotic good given substance. It grants her all the basic abilities of a 10th-level paladin, except she cannot cast spells and detects law or chaos instead of good or evil. Her paladinlike nature is also a drawback. In Ravenloft, darklords can sense when she has entered their land (see the guidelines for paladins in the *Domains of Dread* rulebook).

Among Isoldes' more mysterious and astounding new characteristics is the 300-foot nimbus that surrounds her. Within this sphere, she can cause almost any change or effect she wills—given the will, and enough time and focus. (The dark powers add ironic twists and limits in keeping with the flavor of Ravenloft. She cannot kill the incubus with a glance, for example, but she *can* supercede the powers of darklords in her presence.) Once willed, the changes are permanent unless she undoes them.

One nimbus phenomenon occurs automatically, like a side effect: All living beings inside the sphere slowly change, their inner natures gradually becoming manifest in their outer appearances and abilities. This is the Twisting. Isolde cannot control the changes and does not mind them; the Twisting is a something she has always thought should be the case.

In effect, the Carnival functions as a Floating Pocket domain, according to the classifications in *Domains of Dread*. Isolde is its demilord. Within its confines, it subtly superimposes its own "natural law" over the domains through which it passes.